

78
QUARTERLY
Volume One—No. 3
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78 QUARTERLY

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Backstage with 78 Quarterly
Wild celebration marks magazine's
20th Anniversary in Key West!

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Fiction

In 1906 two men have a strange en-
counter in a New Orleans "drug-
store." In 1934 another man hitches
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The Anatomy Of A "Race"
Label—Part 1: by Stephen Calt
The mysterious history of Para-
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that literally "vanished."

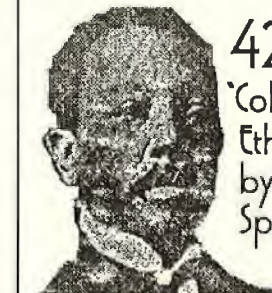


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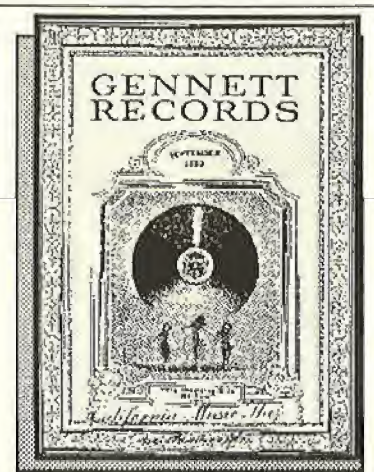


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VOLUME ONE, NO. 3

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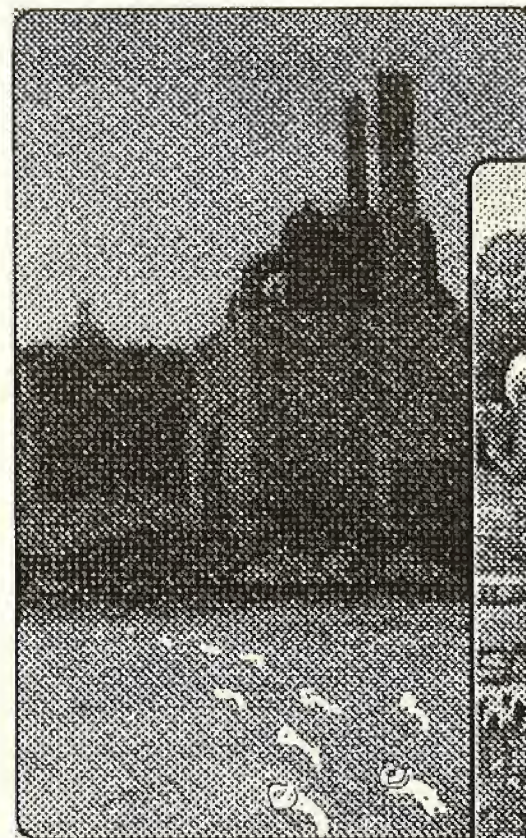
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:



Burn Baby, Burn!... "Life is a bitch—and then I married one", as they say. The woman I married is a typical salesman's wife. Your readers will remember her letter in your first issue over 20 years ago. She was the lady who made my entire collection disappear. She conducted a backyard cookout—a core meltdown of my entire 78 collection—leaving a vague assemblage of ashes one finds in a crematory urn. These included items on Electrobeam Gennett, Paramount, Champion, Victor 23 thousand series—and even a couple of Black Patts. She wrote: "My husband is away on a business trip...I would give a fortune to see the expression on his face. Unfortunately, my name still echoes through The 78 Hall Of Fame. Suffice it to say I'm remarried and only collect LP's. Sincerely—T. GROZ, Topeka, Kansas.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: (CONTINUED)



Hudson River Whitefish Nature's Answer To Man-Made Pollution!

I have not received my copy of 78 QUARTERLY for several years (has it been 20 years already?). I tried (in vain) several times to reach your organization. Then, I did., but have yet to get an intelligent response from your office. Is your secretary on drugs? The last time I called, she explained that the office was being converted into a condom factory and that she was on leave—going to Atlantic City to see Julio Iglesias! I cannot believe that the owner of the "greatest" magazine in the music world has allowed himself to be degraded, taking advantage of a filthy commodity. Where are the morals, the integrity that made this magazine a cut above the rest? If I had a subscription, I would immediately cancel. Actually, I'm glad the subscription ran out. Thanks to you and your staff of incompetents, this saves me the trouble of having to cancel myself. An emotional waste—all of this. I call you all assholes. Which is what you are! Sincerely —HAROLD FEASTERER, VA.



The American Dream A Better Way Of Life!

Dear Editor, I've had my eye on you guys for a really long time, if you ever get tired of writing about the sex life of Charlie Patton or the baroque appetites of Jelly Roll Morton, give me a call. I'm adequately equipped to handle the whole staff—with two for one jobs on weekends. I really am good at relieving stress. If you could send me photos of your entire staff, I'm sure we could work something out. My phone number is (205) 567-5675. You can call collect after 7 P.M. My couch is a fold-away. It's comfortable even for three. (Visa/Master Card only). —SUSAN SULAKSKI, Surf City, NJ.



The Miracle Marriage Of Plastic Surgery And Genetic Engineering...

Sirs: Last summer my eight-year-old son was bitten in the face by my neighbor's black and white Pit Bull Terrier (see Sports Illustrated). Part of his left cheek tore loose from its socket. Today, his jaw is held together by mechanical springs. He has a hard time saying what's on his mind. Sometimes the words come out backwards. There are moments when he sounds like Donald Duck or a speeded-up tape recorder. All of which makes me wonder if the mandolin player, Al Miller (who, I'm sure your readers remember as the "souped-up" vocalist on the King Mutt/Frisky Foot Jackson sides) might not have had a similar jaw operation. Very truly yours—DOM VINCI, Patterson, NJ.



78 QUARTERLY CELEBRATES ITS 20th ANNIVERSARY IN KEY WEST!

A gala, up-tempo staff party, hosted by 78 *Quarterly*, blasted off January 12 at the *Chez-Nouvelle* restaurant in Key West, Fl. Staff and guests celebrated 20 years of non-stop deluxe publishing. The magazine's long-awaited birthday swelled with guests, then erupted into a mardi-gras "en-miniature"—disappointing those who anticipated a more funereal event.

The occasion began with sizzling musicales from such luminaries as the Lester Lannon Orch., the "chocolate-au-lait" ragtime of Peter Duchin, and the haunting bitter-sweet blues of famed operatic star Pavaratti. Festivities were described by on-lookers as "sensational," "wild," and "very unusual." During intermissions dance-participation rap music was piped in from a tastefully scarred "Bronx attaché case."

A touch of elegance...

The three-day festivities began on a damp note, when master-of-ceremonies, Bruce Brighton, was pushed—or (as some claimed)—was "bumped" into the *Chez-Nouvelle* swimming pool. Grim-faced, with the pinched look of a near-sighted rodent, he climbed up the ladder from the deep end. "It's a good thing I've got a sense of hu-

mor," he said. "It's a good thing this is a rented suit," he added.

The following day guests heard ground-breaking speeches delivered at the local high-school auditorium followed by cocktails and a late luncheon. The first talk, entitled "An Anthropologist Looks into The Socio-Economic Aspects of Blues And Jazz within The Context of American 20th Century Culture," and lasting nearly two hours, was delivered by Dr. E.V. Lindstrom, Assoc. Professor of Anthropology, University of Toronto. Another speech described an important function of today's jazz critic: "grading and evaluating the purient performances of today's pop compact-disk output." An hour-long slide show followed with a color presentation of current Swedish rock band groups. Afterwards came a flute recital—"Appalachian Ballads No.1 through No.11"—by *avant-garde* composer/performer Arnold Katz.

Feast of the gods...

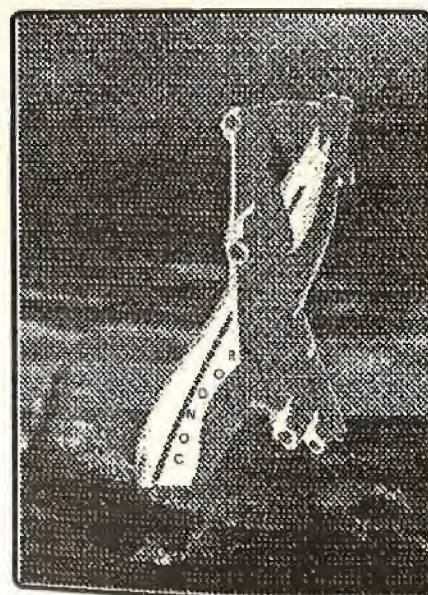
Immediately afterwards, white-jacketed waiters set up a buffet table with *hors d'oeuvres* and a choice of vintage wines. Edibles consisted of tofu *pâté*, *amberjack suchi*, brains-*flambé*, and extra-large drumstick-size frogs legs (*Buffo marina*) in a delicate *poupon* mustard sauce.



Guests enjoyed viewing flights of migratory *Blattidus scaleus* that occasionally scampered across the floor in sudden panic. "No charge for the extra protein," our waiter grinned. Refreshments included an interesting vintage '40's Gallo muscatel, a nostalgic, but hearty Shadow Martin, and the familiar, full-bodied Maneshevitz. Current favorites, such as MOD 20-20, Thunderbird, Champale, and the all-purpose Fleischman gin, were also featured. Trucked in from Miami Beach were five cases of exquisite 1968 (symbolizing the magazine's first full year of publication) André champagne—for endless rounds of toast proposals.

The final send-off...

The morning's events were subdued. Several guests described "The Chinese Cure" for hangovers and a significant discussion of world events ensued. Breakfast was held at the *Chez-nouvelle*, during which, dynamo music critic Don Hals gave a two-hour talk on "The Contribution of Jazz and Blues to U.S. Cultural Influences and East-West Friendship throughout The World." Luncheon at the *Chez-Nouvelle* preceded a real eye-opener, an audience give-and-take slide show on "The Creative and Psychoanalytical Relationship between The Artist, The Blues Singer, and The Politician—in their personal quest for recognition and identity." At three p.m. a final couple, Mr. and Mrs. Vasily Gallagher of Grimwald, Wisc., were spotted by your reporter at the exit terminal of the Key West airport. □



From: WOMEN IN RED— 1903-1907 by P. Armstrong-Duplessis (courtesy of Gaslight Press Co.)

Well, the first time I seen this fellow Buddy was in 1906. He was sitting small and curled up in this soft-goods store (they call them drugstores). He sat at the counter, looking at this empty coke glass and he was holding a spoon and sort of dangle and balancing the spoon on one finger, and then the spoon would drop on the counter. Then he'd pick up the spoon and put it back on his finger and the spoon would drop off

again and hit the counter with this clatter. Every so often he'd take a deep pull on this cigarillo, which he cupped in his hand and then he'd put the cigarillo on the edge of the counter and go on balancing the spoon. Very cool like.

Mr. Simmons was the only other person in the drugstore. He was behind the counter, washing glasses with his sleeves rolled up. Dark patches showed when he

raised his arms.

I had walked in the drugstore by this time and seen this older boy, Buddy, and it was too late to leave on account of you couldn't make a good exit that soon, so I went over to the wood magazine rack. It was next to a window where you could see the street.

I began thumbing though all the magazines and all the weird books, like Police Gazette, Adventure, and Jungle Jim, which features this Senorita Rio, where you always see her wearing short pants and having a big wrestle with some lion.

This boy at the counter turned around and said. "Ain't I seen you here before?"

I said it didn't seem very likely, not being much of a Coca-Cola addict.

"I guess the new Picayune hasn't come in yet," I said to Mr. Simmons.

"It comes at noon," Mr. Simmons said.

I looked through the racks and checked top and bottom and I could see there wasn't any magazine that interested me. So I put Jungle Jim in the rack with the others and headed for the door.

This fellow had turned all the way around, facing me and resting his elbows back on the counter.

"Gettin' an education?" he asked.

"Well, I'm staying on top of it' you know," I said.

This boy took the lit cigarillo off the counter and cupped the cigarillo in his hand, and took a drag, and blew out this smoke.

"Goin' somewhere?" he asked.

I said I thought I'd take a stroll outside.

He pointed to an empty stool next to him, then laid his hand over it and spun it in a circle.

"Take a seat, hey fel'.

"Hey, Dad, coke this boy up," he said to Mr. Simmons.

Mr. Simmons looked up and didn't say anything. He had finished washing the glasses and he was stacking them upside down under the counter.

I walked over and sat down on the stool.

Mr. Simmons took one glass and made a coke and dropped in some ice and stirred it with a spoon. He

put the coke down on the counter about two feet from where I was sitting.

Buddy made a long reach and picked up the glass with this gesture and put it in front of me.

"My pleasure," he said.

"Thanks," I said. I took a sip.

"Taste good?" he asked.

I said it wasn't bad.

"You like the name Buddy?"

I said sure.

"Think you'd ever forget it?" he asked.

I said I didn't have too good a memory for names, but I try and remember them, since I forgot them pretty fast.

"You don't forget them when they come to you," he said.

I took another sip from this coke and said that's right.

Buddy stuck a hand in his pocket and brought out a little dog's foot with a metal peg and chain and keys.

"Good luck key chain," he said.

He stuck his hand back in the pocket and took out some change. He chose off a nickel and flipped it up in the air a foot or so. He caught it with his other hand and slapped it down on the counter.

"You call it," he said.

I took a big swallow of the coke.

Mr. Simmons was setting the last of the glasses out to dry. He was setting them upside down next to the sink.

"You can't gamble in here," Mr. Simmons said. "This is a drugstore."

"You pushin' drugs?" this boy asked.

Mr. Simmons was standing behind the counter. He was starting to roll down his sleeves. He was watching Buddy and not saying anything.

Buddy held this nickel up. Then he flipped it and slapped it down on the counter.

I was looking at the coke. I tilted the coke up and finished the last of it. I set it down and stood up.

I put a dime on the counter.

"Here's for the coke," I said to Mr. Simmons.

Mr. Simmons took the dime and walked over to the cash register and put it in the drawer.

(Photo courtesy HENRY REINHARD)



(Freddie Keppard
c.1928)

"I have to run along," I said to Buddy.

"I thought you was a big time sport," Buddy said.

"Well, I'm on a diet," I said.

Mr. Simmons came back to the counter and picked up Buddy's empty glass.

"Watcha think Dad? You think he oughta leave?"

"Why don't you join yer frien'," Mr. Simmons said to Buddy.

Buddy said, "You just read the labels on them medicine bottles, Dad."

On account of Mr. Simmons was pretty old, you could see his mouth work and that he was going to speak

but he couldn't get everything out at once.

Buddy turned around on the stool so that his back was to Mr. Simmons.

"Hey, Keppard, I heard you on the street last week. You're hot stuff, boy. You style yourself on Buddy's uptown style."

"Well," I said. "You're still the king of style, you and Perez."

"You're good, boy. Maybe better than Perez. Better than old-man Clem and those boys. I bet you even read the notes."

"Sometimes," I said.

"You know, this town ain't big enough for both of us, you know."

"Maybe," I said.

"You're puttin' on weight. Watch your food, boy. .. You liable to drop dead."

I walked over to the door.

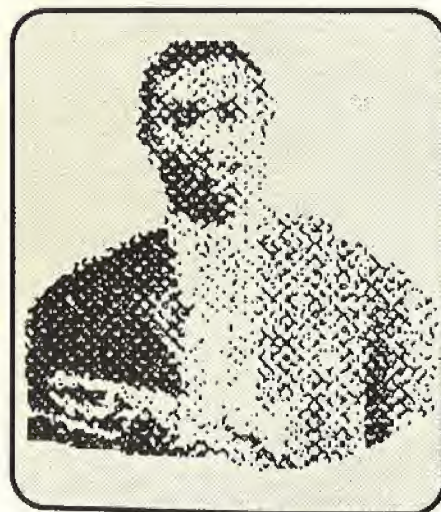
He looked at me standing at the door. He had this smile.

"I don't forget you, boy."

"I'll be around," I said.

"Don't go far," he said.

I walked out the door, past the magazine rack, to where it was hot and bright but where you could at least breathe the air. □



BUDDY BOLDEN—turn of the century

From: SMART STREET— Making It In The 30's

by Nick Diamond
(courtesy of Ace Detective Series,
Sin-Cities Press Co.)

By November of 1934 I was out of work and heading across Indiana. The truck was still moving as I jumped out the back and landed on my feet—hard. Street black was on my knuckles. I got up and looked around.

A row of one-story houses faced the street. They had warped green

shingles on front. It was company housing for workers.

It was still early and I had a lousy hangover. The sun was pale, already fading. There was no warmth in it. I pulled up my collar. It barked my neck. It was stiff with grime, cold, street hard with chill.

I kept walking on the outside of

the street, checking things out, watching the alleys until I found a newsstand at the corner. This fellow in a wool cap was bent over. He wore gloves with the fingers cut out. He was cutting twine off a bundle of newspapers, taking the newspapers and putting them up on shelves.

"Hey brother," I said. "What's the name of this town?"

He looked up. He had a wax face pulled tight with scar tissue. You could see he went the distance in too many eight-rounders.

"Richmond," he said. "No place for big-city hot shots."

"Got any eateries nearby?"

"Up there—that saloon up at the corner?"

"Swell," I said.

I had had my fill of saloons last night in Ohio.

I walked to the corner at the end of the block and looked it over.

You can spot a cheap saloon all right. It had the glass squares on front, and up above was this sign reading "Superior Bar & Grill". A metal door at the entrance had dents in it. I opened the door and right away you got the smell of beer. I looked around inside. Two dim characters huddled over the counter. They were nondescripts. A bartender behind the counter wiped glasses with a rag. He was bowling-pin fat. He had a penguin face and a stained apron covered his corporation.

He said: "Hey Jack, close the god-damn door. Come in or out. Don't freeze my ass."

Someone had taped a cheap poster over a cracked mirror behind the bar: it featured a list of names and under them it said "Champion Records—two hits for two bits." Most of the finish had worn off the counter, leaving dry spots and raw wood. Brown stains spread out on the walls in back. They still looked damp. Last summer's flypaper still curled down from the ceiling. Featured at the top was this one light bulb, naked. The two men at the counter were grizzled, unshaved. They were the usual drifters in burlap clothes who make up the population in this part of the world.

I pulled back a stool and sat down. The bartender came over.

"You really got some style here," I said.

"This is a factory town," he said. "We got no use for interior decorators."

"I'm with the symphony orchestra," I said.

"Whattaya play? The Aeolian swinette?"

"Forget it," I said.

He said, "We used to get musicians park in and out of this place. Hillbillies and colored. Now it's those who are lookin' for work and them who's outta work."

"Whattaya got at the lunch table?" I asked.

I got up and walked down along the counter until I came to the free lunch. It was laid out on a table in tin rectangles. Each tin had something different. There was brisket of beef, pickled pig's feet, hard-boiled eggs in beet juice, pickled corn, and weiners in dumplings.

I pointed to the weiners. "What do they call this?"

"That there is a covered wagon," the bartender said. "The free lunch will cost you 15 cents."

"I thought it was supposed to be free," I said.

"Brother, nothin' in this life is free," he said.

I walked over to the bartender and put the 15 cents on the counter.

One of the two men next to me turned around from the counter and said, "Friend, can you spare a few cents for the proletariat?"

"Hey, comrade," I said. "If you were Trotsky or that great man Lenin, himself, I couldn't afford it."

This fellow smiled. He had no teeth. "Them that lives off the hog, eats swine," he said. "Comrade."

"You sound like an expert on the Aeolian swinette," I said.

"I ain't expert in nothin' but hunger, friend. How about it? Some spare change."

"Not today, thanks," I said. "By the way, why don't you both get jobs?" I said. The bartender came over to where the three of us were talking and said, "Why don't all three of you playboys get jobs?" He pointed around the room. "Or at least act like customers."

"What kind of jobs they got at the factory?"

"They got one for a trashman up at the pressin' plant."

"Someone had taped a cheap poster over a cracked mirror..."

The one with no teeth looked over at me and said, "That's a job for white trash"

"Or a job for swine," I said.

"It's been open three days."

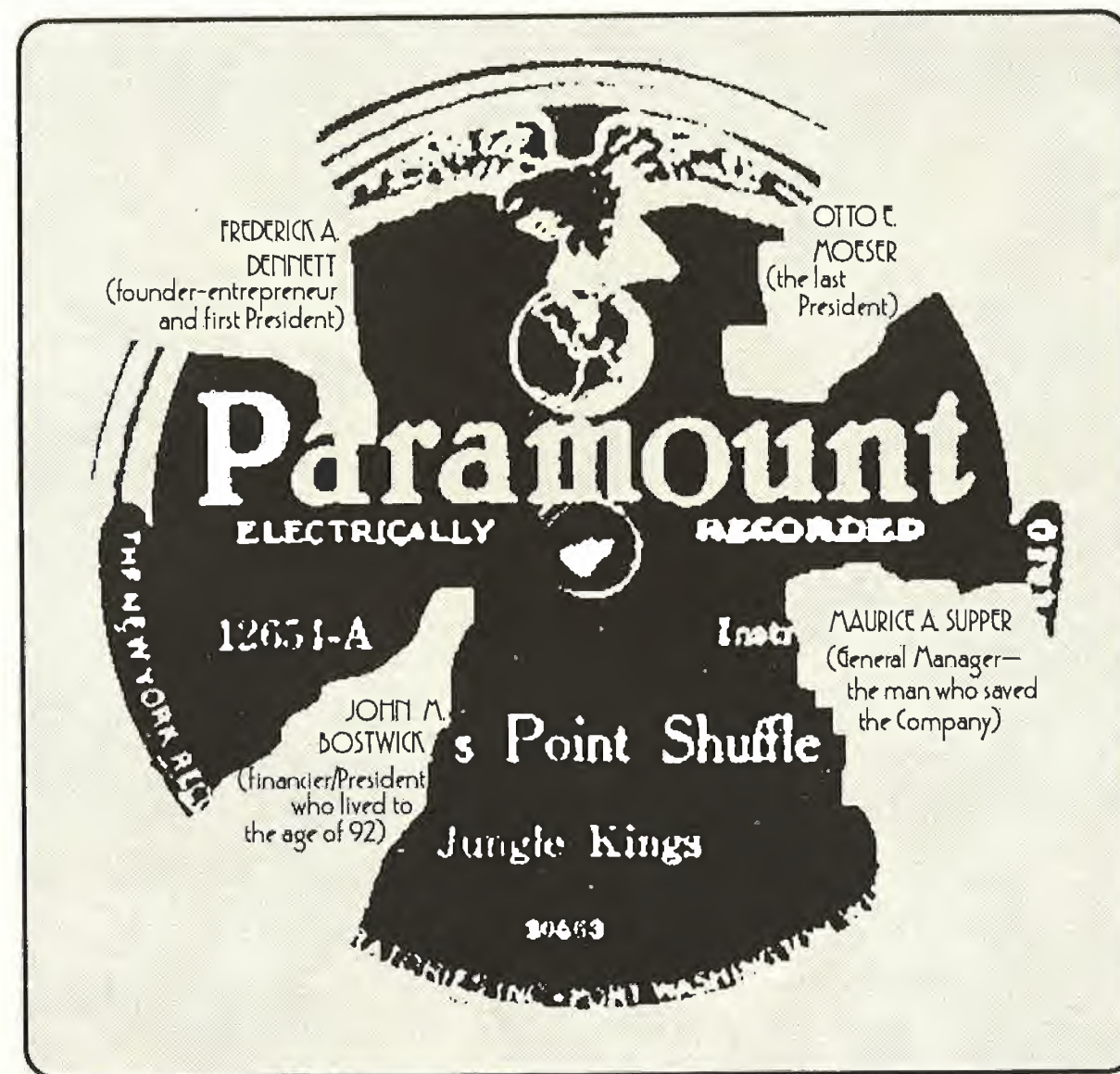
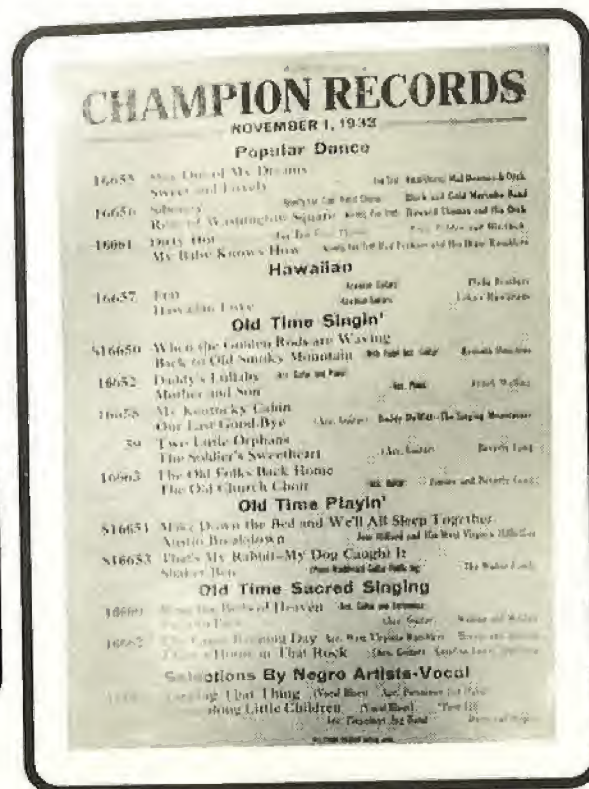
"O.K." I said. "I need the dough."

The bartender picked up an empty glass and said, "You'll get dough. I'll get a commission." He set the glass down in front of me. "Here, he said, "have a free beer. It's on The Superior Bar & Grill."

That winter I got a job hauling records from this unheated warehouse and driving them away to the dump in this broken-down pickup truck. First, I had to separate the records by the colors on the labels. Each pile had a different color. There were piles of red labels, black labels, pale orange, and dark green. I can't remember the name of the company or the pressing plant next to the warehouse. Not that I'd want to. But with all the clean-up jobs for that outfit, I must have hauled off thousands of piles. They would turn your arms to lead, going from one dump to another, sometimes busting them up—through the whole winter—blue at dawn, grey and windy in the afternoon, then the freezing hell at the end of the day. It was Depression times.

But things got better after that. I made it out of Indiana. The first day I

hitched a ride all the way to Bakersfield, California. Then I sprang for the bus fare up to Hollywood. By the spring of '34 I was a bodyguard for silver screen star Eve Sanguine. She was spoiled, petulant and spoon-fed all right, but hot. Hot for me, if you get my gist. This was how my career as a private detective began—at The Smith & Field Detective Agency. And that's where this story really begins...with the murder of my partner and the disappearance of his wife, Lorna. □



THE ANATOMY Of A "Race" Label—Part One

by Stephen Calt



(photo by RALPH KALISOR)

4th of July celebration, Port Washington, about 1880. "It was the only settlement besides New York where draft riots occurred during the Civil War."

(photo courtesy STEPHEN GALT)

Introduction:

In ten years of live blues recording (1922-1932) Paramount produced nearly a quarter of the "race" record output of the period. Its complete catalog of a thousand-odd releases reads like a primer of blues greats: Ma Rainey, Papa Charlie Jackson, Charlie Patton, and Skip James were all Paramount properties. Only in recent decades has Paramount's rich musical trove been apparent, for its owners scrapped both its recording ledgers and record inventory during the Depression. To this day the company itself remains as obscure as many of its artists, causing a discographer to note: "less is known of the operation of Paramount than of any other race label."

In its own business lifetime Paramount was insignificant within record industry circles; as the former president of its largest wholesaler put it: "...It was one of those so-called 'non-standard' brands." Ultimately Paramount's relative insignificance explains its genesis as a label specializing in black music. On its initial capitalization of \$10,000 and \$75,000 seed money, the company could make no inroads against such competitors as Brunswick, which was owned by the country's largest bowling ball manufacturer and could afford to offer its star attraction Al Jolson a contract calling for \$10,000 per record in 1924. The penny-ante fifty or seventy-five dollar stakes commanded by blues artists were better suited to Paramount's scale of operations.

Its corporate records have inexplicably vanished...

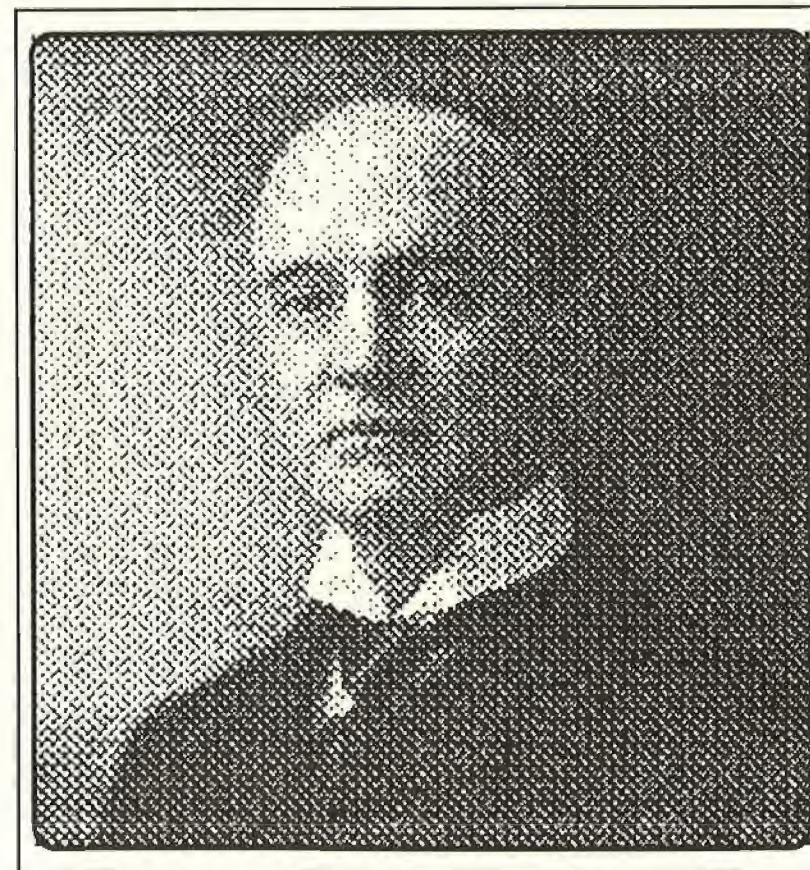
In retrospect Paramount's pretensions as a record label of any stripe seem far-fetched. It was operated as one of numerous business subsidiaries of the Wisconsin Chair Company of Port Washington, Wisconsin, a city far removed from the mainstream of the record industry. The chair company, which went bankrupt and formally dissolved on October 27, 1954, seems to have made Keats' epitaph its own. Its corporate records have inexplicably vanished from state and county files. Just as Paramount never placed advertisements in the trade journals of the 1920s, so did the

Wisconsin Chair Company eschew even the most routine forms of publicity, never advertising in the same local papers that gave play to the mundane social doings of its executives. A German language pamphlet issued in 1908 by the *Port Washington Zeitung* lists every conceivable shade of local mercantile establishment, from saloons to tombstone manufacturers, but carries no mention of the chair company. Neither the company nor its recording subsidiary appear in the 1927 *Classified Directory of Wisconsin Manufacture*, which purports to list every manufacturer in the state. A Port Washington newspaper's list of local taxpayers (published in 1924) fails to include either the chair company or Paramount Records, though it reckons the taxes of the latter's own relatively minor music publishing subsidiary.

Yet this seeming cipher was elsewhere touted by the same newspaper, the *Port Washington Star*, as "the great factor in building up and beautifying our city," while the *Wisconsin State Gazetteer* called it "the largest chair factory in the world" in its 1927-8 edition. Its founder

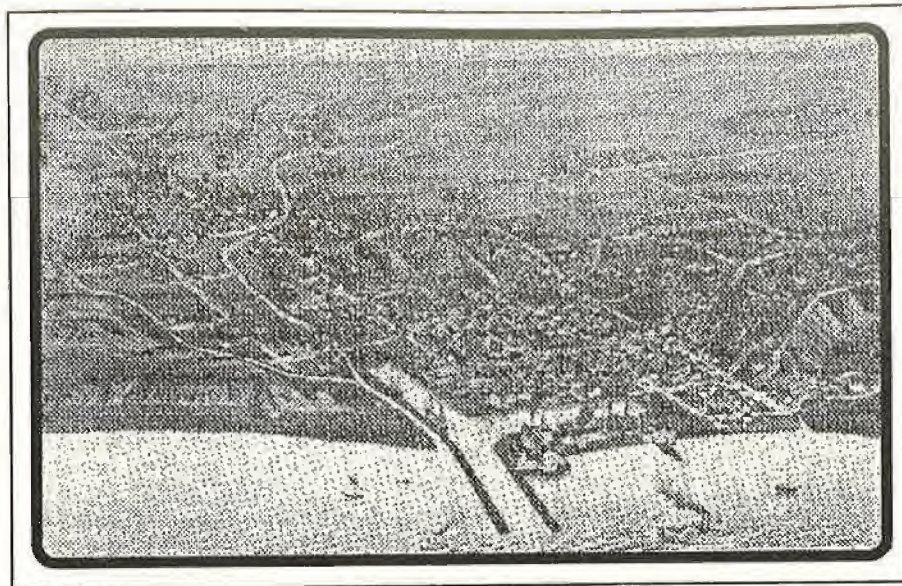
Frederick A. Dennett (1849-1920), who both literally and figuratively christened the Paramount label, was described by the *Star* as "one of the leading manufacturers in the country."

Though his name is not found in the *Wisconsin Dictionary of Biography*, "old man Dennett" (as he was termed by his wage-hands) was one of the state's most prominent businessmen. The grandson of a Revolutionary War veteran, he spent nearly all of his life in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, which was known as "the city of cheese, chairs, churches and children" during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Dennett family arrived there from Greenville, Maine in 1851, when Fred was two. In 1874, his 47-year old mother, his younger brother "J.R." and a sister left Sheboygan to stake a frontier claim in Russell, Kansas. Fred, who had graduated from a Milwaukee commercial college around 1870, spent the next fifteen years in a variety of business pursuits, working as a secretary for a reaper manufacturer in Beloit, as a salesman for Beloit shoe company, as a manufacturer of mowers in



(photo: courtesy STEPHEN GALT)

Fred A. Dennett—"old man Dennett" as he was termed by his wage hands")



(photo courtesy STEPHEN CALT)

Port Washington in 1883.

binders in Milwaukee (forming a company that eventually became a branch of International Harvester) and, in 1884-1885, as a sales agent for a Philadelphia machinery company.

He began his career in chair manufacturing by co-founding the Mattoon Manufacturing Company of Sheboygan in 1886 with George B. Mattoon (1847-1904), another transplanted Yankee who was regarded as Sheboygan's leading industrial pioneer. The Mattoon Company was begun with a capital stock of \$300,000; its original plant, built on a swamp, employed thirty-five men. After the factory burned down in 1887 Dennett evidently decided to go into business for himself. He chose to locate his fledgling chair company at Port Washington, which had only incorporated six years previously and then numbered 1800 residents, of whom 600, by 1898 would become his employees. The city itself, which was named after the first President and is locally called "Port", had enjoyed but a single national distinction when Dennett set up shop there: it was the only settlement besides New York where draft riots occurred during the Civil War. Its harbor location along Lake Michigan was probably what commended it to Dennett as an industrial site.

Dennett's company was origi-

nally situated in a dormant sash, door and blind factory known as the "planing plant" whose previous occupant, the Port Washington Manufacturing Company, had gone bankrupt in 1886. On August 25, 1888, the plant was auctioned off to a local investor for \$9,300, and Dennett appears to have interested himself in the property immediately afterwards. The *Port Washington Star*



(photo courtesy STEPHEN CALT)

J.R. Dennett... confined to his room in 1923 after a "total nervous breakdown."

reported two weeks later that "A large meeting of tax payers was held in the Singer Hall last Monday to consider the proposition of Mr. F. A. Dennett, of Sheboygan, in regard to the plant of the Mfg. Co. It was decided to circulate a resolution for signers and a committee was appointed for that purpose. If sufficient interest is taken in the matter and enough names are secured, a special election will be called to vote upon the matter, and here it rests for the present." The matter must rest there for the future as well; ensuing issues of the *Star* are missing from state archives.


Apparently Dennett's proposition, whatever it entailed, was favorably received; on October 20, 1888, his company was incorporated as the Wisconsin Chair Company of Port Washington (formally becoming the Wisconsin Chair Company in 1904). The chair company, the Supreme Court of Wisconsin would declare after Dennett's death, was "largely the Dennett Company." It was also largely a family operation: his brother John Randall Dennett (1855-1924), who had been working as a realty agent in Kansas City, was appointed its vice-president and secretary. The two Dennetts were inseparable business and social partners: in 1889, J.R. would marry the younger sister of Fred's wife Clara. He would hold executive positions in most of his brother's assorted businesses until 1923, when he was confined to his room after suffering what a local paper termed a "total nervous breakdown". Although he lived in Port Washington (as Fred did not), he was the lesser figure in the company's rapid business growth, which, the *Star* claimed, constituted "one of the most remarkable examples of development in the history of the state..."

By the end of 1888 the chair company had begun producing spring mattresses and other items of furniture. By 1892 it employed some 350 workers. Within six years it occupied a vast ten acre complex along the Port Washington lake front consisting of seven three- and four- story buildings, the largest of which (a wood shop) measured sixty by a hundred and twenty feet. The company also owned extensive timberland in northern Michigan and in the vicin-

ity of Wickliffe, Kentucky, from which places the logs it used for making chairs were hewn through company sawmills and transported to the plant by rail or in a company-owned barge. Many of the chairs the company produced were of its own patented designs; they were variously intended for offices, kitchens, schools, and public auditoriums. In later years the company would wholesale its own products through a subsidiary (the National School Equipment Company); among its clients was Sears Roebuck.

tive of Parish, New York, he had begun his self-made business career as the twelve-year-old apprentice of a Binghamton, New York jeweler. In 1860 he moved to Port Washington and became a postal employee; five years later he opened a local jewelry shop on Franklin Street. Around the turn of the century, he added the sale of fire insurance to his other business interests. At the time of his death he was still involved in all three professions, and his jewelry store ranked as the city's oldest active business firm.¹

JOHN M. BOSTWICK,



WATCHMAKER,
JEWELER,
Engraver and Optician.

FINE WATCH AND CLOCK REPAIRING
A SPECIALTY.

FIRE AND LIFE INSURANCE.
PORT WASHINGTON, WIS.

(courtesy STEPHEN CALT)

This jewelry store was "the city's oldest active business firm." Bostwick became chair company president at the age of 83.

By 1898, when the company's capital stock was worth \$250,000, the *Star* speculated that "probably over half the city's population is dependent on the prosperity and continued operation of this immense industry..." A year later the company's plant was completely destroyed by fire. The regeneration of the firm was credited to another of its organizers, John M. Bostwick (1837-1935), who had been an executor of the estate that acquired the factory of the defunct Port Washington Manufacturing Company in 1888. Bostwick was to replace J.R. Dennett as the company vice-president around 1914; he became its president at the age of eighty-three when, in March of 1920, Fred Dennett dropped dead of a heart attack while awaiting the Port Washington trolley after visiting Paramount's pressing plant. A na-

The company's recovery and renewed prosperity (which was reflected in stock increases in 1900, 1904, and 1912) was also facilitated by the Dennett's political connections. Both took an active part in Republican affairs, and Fred Dennett's campaigning was credited with electing Joseph Quarles to the U.S. Senate. Between 1901 and 1905 he served as the mayor of Sheboygan, donating his salary to the local public library he had arranged for Andrew Carnegie to endow. Previously, from 1896 to 1901, he had served as the representative of Sheboygan and Ozaukee County (a single district) in the state Senate, chairing its manufacturing committee. These political posts were a logical extension of his business interests: he supported a party platform in 1896 that was little more

than a wholesale endorsement of big business, piously hailing "honest money with which to pay the wages of labor...and carry on the business of this great country..." Only in espousing the desirability of American labor over immigrant workers (another conservative shibboleth of the times) was Dennett's political party at odds with his private interests as a manufacturer, for Port Washington and its environs had a considerable foreign population. Over a third of Ozaukee County's residents were German-born at the time he left the Senate, and many of them were doubtless employed by the Wisconsin Chair Company.

"The contemporary worker was expected to be docile..."

As an employer, Dennett received high marks from a state factory inspector who reported (according to the *Star* of March 26, 1898) that the wages he paid on a monthly basis were 15% higher than those paid elsewhere in the state for comparable work. With typical smugness the *Star* added: "It would be a hard matter for evil-disposed persons or professional labor agitators to stir up our people or the employees against the company." The contemporary worker was expected to be docile, regardless of hardships and hazards. When a nineteen year old employee of Dennett's company was blown out of a building by a gasoline explosion that levelled all four of its ten foot high brick walls, the state supreme court ruled that the injured party was not entitled to a penny from his employer.

A chain gang and workhouse discouraged vagrants from tarrying in the vicinity...

None of Dennett's workers were black; in 1900, Ozaukee County had not a single black resident. A chain gang and a workhouse recently inaugurated by the Port Washington town council discouraged vagrants of either race from tarrying in the vicinity. In later years, when Paramount's lone black executive (J. Mayo Williams) would visit the record company's front of-

fice at Pier and Lake Street he was invariably followed through town by local school children, who found him an object of curiosity. The company's black recording artists would be excluded from the only commercial hotel in Grafton, where Paramount's recording studio was located, and thus took lodging in Milwaukee.

A' penchant for amoeba-like subdivision...

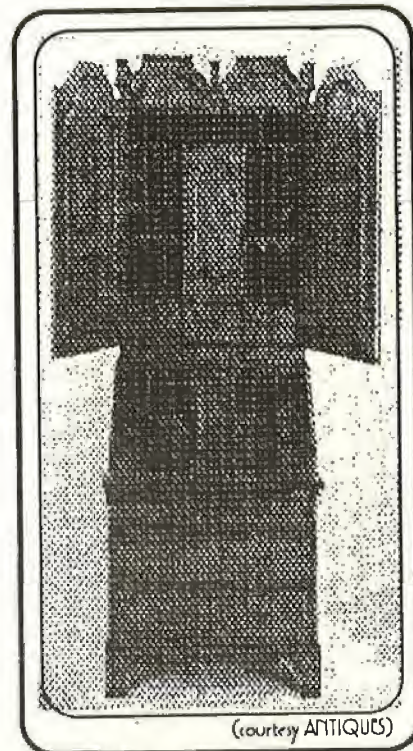
Dennett's decision to enter the record business was purely speculative. The company's previous involvement with phonographs had consisted of a sideline in producing cabinets during the early 1900s for the Edison Company, which did not patent its own phonograph cabinet until 1909. The sale of a knitting plant Dennett had operated in New London, Wisconsin to Edison in 1914 may have pricked interest in the record industry. After Edison's main plant in West Orange, New Jersey burned down in December of 1914, the New London location probably saw a good deal of production, which would not have escaped Dennett. At the same time, the birth of a record company reflected the chair company's penchant for amoeba-like subdivision and diversification. These various ventures (some of which were probably little more than paper enterprises) included the Sheboygan Knitting Company (founded in 1891), two furniture companies founded in 1909 and 1910, a couch company founded in 1915, and a canning machine manufacturing company founded in 1922.

United phonograph Corp. claimed it had yet to transact business—a falsehood...

The chair company's interest in phonograph manufacture officially emerged as a belated sideline of its subsidiary, the Northern Couch Company, which was founded on January 19, 1915, with a capital stock of \$30,000. On the following December 14th it amended its corporate articles to include the production of not only furniture, but "phonographs and phonographic records" as well. With this change of purpose the company changed its

name to the United Phonograph Corporation; its headquarters were moved from Port Washington to Indiana Avenue in Sheboygan in April of 1918. By that time, though the company claimed that it had yet to transact any actual business (a falsehood, since ads for its Puritan record line had appeared since the previous October), the chair company had already formed yet another phonograph manufacturing subsidiary using the same directors and officials of the original Northern Couch Company. And although the officials of the two phonograph subsidiaries were one and the same, the companies generated two separate brands of phonographs and records, Puritan and Paramount. The rationale behind this corporate cleavage remains obscure, particularly as both companies offered the same diet of pop music to consumers.

As a speculative business proposition, manufacturing phonographs and records offered the prospect of ready profit to new investors of the period. Once a stodgy, three-cornered monopoly, the phonograph industry had come to resemble chair manufacture, which had become a haven for industrial opportunists when Dennett joined the latter business. As a historian of chairs would characterize the factory models of the mid 1800s: "...an avalanche of gimcrack, gingerbread designs that today would be rejected by even the least educated and that caused machine-made furniture to become a term of reproach."² The same crassness would enter the phonograph industry, thanks to the expiration of the Victor/Columbia joint patent for lateral-cut records in 1914, the recent emergence of a successful upstart label (Emerson, incorporated in April of 1915), and a boom wartime economy that had resulted in a phonograph sales explosion and a deluge of newly-formed phonograph manufacturers. In 1914, some 540,000 people owned phonographs: by 1919, the number had grown to 2,225,000. In 1914, three years before Paramount came into existence, there were fourteen phonograph manufacturers: by 1916 there were 167. The hopes of these arrivistes rested largely on the temporary vacuum created by wartime contracts allotted to Victor, which cut back record production by thirty percent in 1918 in order to furnish airplanes, rifle parts, and other military equipment to the government.



...grandiose 20s' styles...with names like 'Queen Anne'

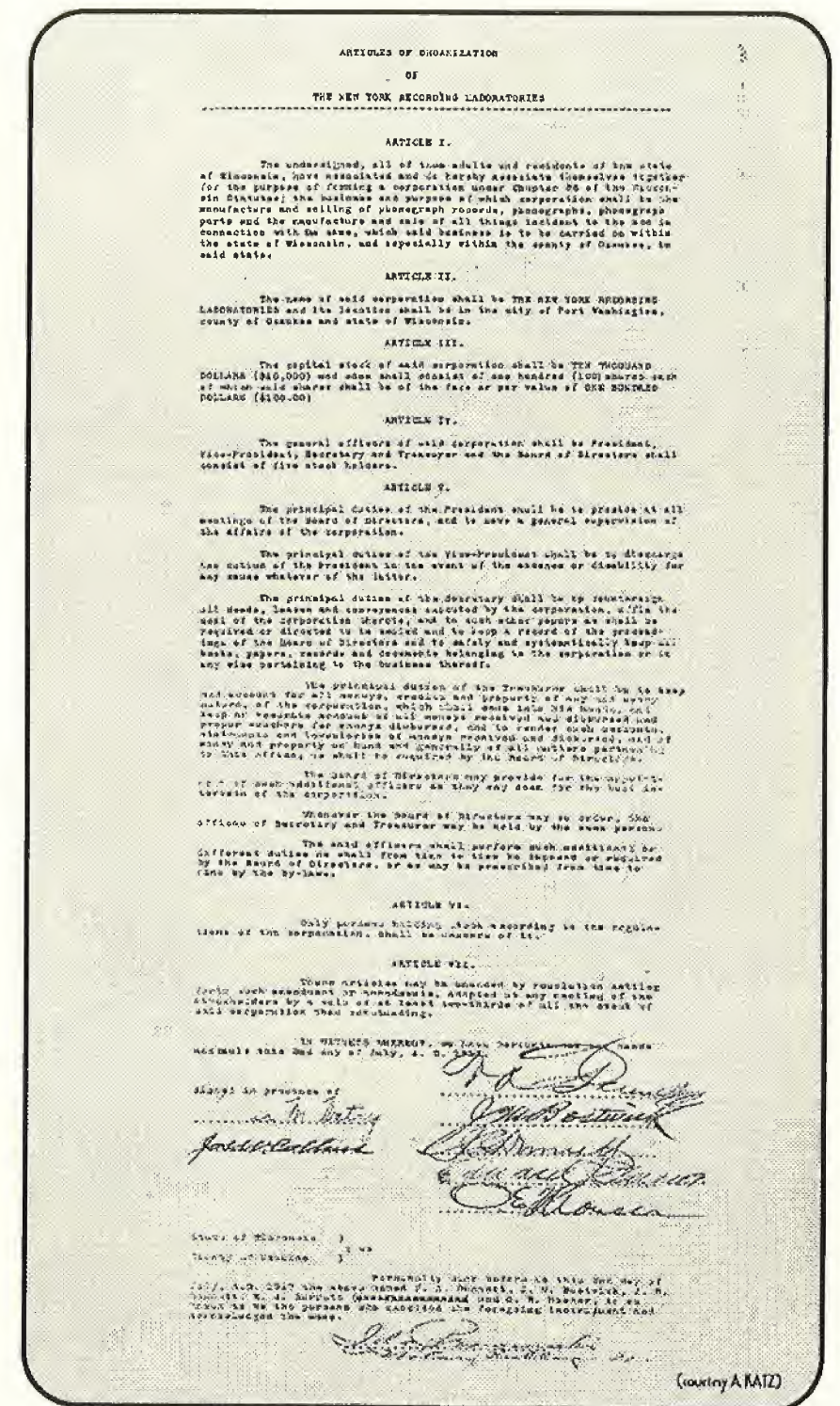
As with most other companies that manufactured records, Paramount and Puritan did so as an adjunct to making phonographs. Ever since early phonograph engineers had managed to hide its cumbersome tin horn within a wooden cabinet the phonograph had been promoted as a decorative piece of living room furniture. This emphasis on form rather than function not only gave rise to grandiose Twenties' styles (reflected in names like "Early Renaissance", "Queen Anne," "William and Mary," and so forth), but to steep prices as well. It also gave a furniture manufacturer like the Wisconsin Chair Company a foothold in the record business, for phonographs were sold primarily in furniture stores, there being no record stores as such. But Paramount was not well-situated for a tyro. The industry's most successful war-baby, Brunswick of Chicago, had evolved in a similar fashion, first producing phonograph cabinets, purely as a means of keeping its wood-working plant at full capacity in the years preceding World War One. Yet by the time it began putting out its own records, Brunswick had already created a profitable phonograph division that acted as a jobber for the Emerson label and

sold half a million records in 1916. Like the Starr Piano Company of Richmond, Indiana, which produced Gennett Records, it owned a national network of branch houses that acted as wholesalers for its phonographs and records. Okeh Records, which would become Paramount's leading rival in the "race" field, did a substantial business in various phonograph products before entering record production: it manufactured \$100,000 worth of phonograph merchandise per day during the war years. It made the standard phonograph motor used by independent companies, and produced such items as needles, tone arms, sound boxes, and springs. By the time it began manufacturing phonographs in 1918 it had been capitalized at two million dollars, and produced such diverse items as fishing reels, insulation material, toy phonographs, and electrical automobile horns.

Its 5 recording directors were 'industry neophytes.'

The Wisconsin Chair Company had no expertise in any aspect of the phonograph business (save cabinet-making). Moreover, it had no jobbers or wholesale departments for its own furniture products: it sold directly to retailers. Once it would enter phonograph production, it would rely on inexperienced chair company personnel to run its operations. Even the five-odd recording directors it employed were industry neophytes when they began supervising Paramount sessions. It was this continued reliance on amateurs, more than its accomplishments in producing black music, that made Paramount a unique company.

Although the label was conceived as a permanent, self-perpetuating enterprise, its profits and losses were absorbed by the chair company.³ Its corporate officials held parallel positions with the chair company, and drew no salaries for their activities on behalf of Paramount. The corporation was formally constituted on July 2, 1917 as "The New York Recording Laboratories", borrowing Thomas Edison's pretentious designation for "studio", and the imagined allure of a phantom New York locale. Its articles of incorporation announced its pur-



1917 CORPORATION PAPERS—

The New York Recording Laboratories and its 5 corporate officers...

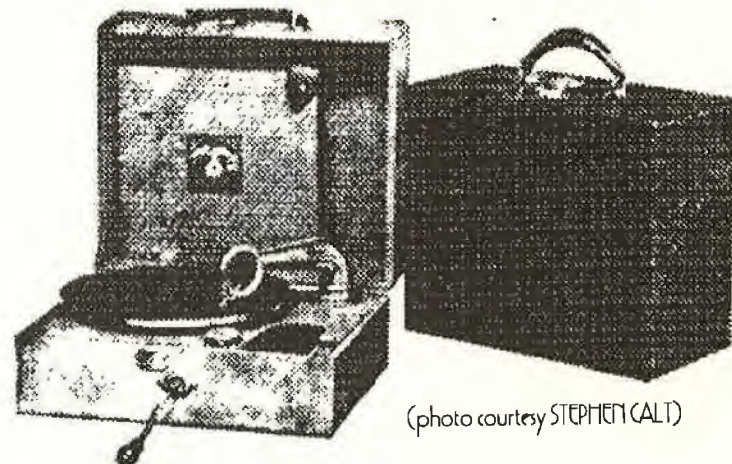
(They used the word 'Laboratories' instead of 'studio'...and a phantom New York locale.)

pose as the "the manufacture and selling of phonograph records, phonographs, phonograph parts, and the manufacture and sale of all things incident to the use in connection with the same..." Besides the Dennett brothers (J.R. Dennett serving as secretary) and J.M. Bostwick (vice-president), its original officials included Dr. Edward Jenner Barrett, a Chicago physician who had married Fred Dennett's daughter Julia in 1905 and had lived with his father-in-law over the next five years. He served as the company treasurer until 1924, when he became its vice-president; J.R. Dennett, who became the company vice-president upon his brother's death in 1920, was then installed as treasurer, a demotion probably occasioned by his mental breakdown.

Another company organizer was Otto E. Moeser, a chair company plant superintendent who would eventually be described in a court paper as "the principal managing officer of the Laboratories." A native of Mikesville, Wisconsin, where he was born on March 4, 1880, Moeser had originally come to Port Washington in 1904 to work as a station master and telegraph agent for the Canadian and Northwestern Railways. After joining the chair company he became a protege of Dennett: at the latter's suggestion he became a chair company investor in 1913 by purchasing \$10,000 worth of its preferred stock.⁴ At first he sat on the New York Recording Laboratories' board of directors (as he did at United Phonograph), holding no executive title; upon the death of Fred Dennett he became the company secretary. Upon J.R. Dennett's death in 1924 he assumed the vice-presidency of both the record company and the Wisconsin Chair Company, and he would succeed Bostwick as the chair company president upon the latter's death on March 6, 1935. He retained control of the company until its dissolution some twenty years later.

'Moeser ran the money, and Bostwick financed all of it.'

In broad terms, Moeser could be described as Paramount's chief executive officer, at least from 1924 onwards. "Moeser ran the money, and Bostwick financed all of it," J. Mayo Williams recalled. He also had



(photo courtesy STEPHEN ALT)

Vista phonographs ranged from \$25 to \$125—
None were successful...

banking interests, serving as a vice-president of the Port Washington State Bank in 1929 and becoming a director of the Mutual Investors Company and Milwaukee Investment Fund a year afterwards.

The hand of nepotism that had placed Barrett within Paramount's hierarchy was felt throughout chair company operations. As far back as 1889 Dennett had given his paternal uncle Albert an executive role in the chair company, while J.R. Dennett's son-in-law, a man named Paul Winner, was appointed secretary of the canning company J.R. founded in 1922. Bostwick dispensed power in the same paternal fashion: in 1889 his daughter Ellen married William H. Ramsey, Jr., a chair company founder who then served as its secretary-treasurer. His son Edward Blake Bostwick (b. 1864) served as the chair company's original accountant; his son in turn became vice-president of the National School Equipment Company in 1935. Otto Moeser's brother-in-law Hans Kratzer became the official (though not actual) director of Paramount's Chicago office in the mid 1920s, and his son Marshall ran the Atlanta branch of the school equipment company. The corporate purse-strings, however, ran a good deal shorter than its umbilical cord, as Hans Kratzer complained to Harry Charles. "They give you everything," he would tell the Atlanta record salesman. "I don't get anything. They're tight with me."⁵ Barrett took an even less benign view of Moeser: believing himself the victim of fraud and conspiracy, he would eventually launch a counterplot de-

signed to destroy the company.

Following its incorporation The New York Recording Laboratories plunged into almost immediate phonograph production. Although the firm's first annual report (filed on February 25, 1918) stated that it was "only 'getting started'" during the previous year and had conducted no business transactions in that time, company-made needles (every point a sharp point") and Vista phonographs ranging from \$25 to \$125 had already been advertised by Port Washington's leading department store the previous November. In addition, six free Paramount records were offered to prospective Vista customers. Even before that, in August of 1917, the company had garished local publicity by donating a portable Vista and various records to Port Washington infantry volunteers, causing the *Star* to gush: "This act of generosity is very deeply appreciated by members of the company, for a phonograph will be a source of great pleasure for the boys in camp or on the train."

Although the capitalization of the New York Recording Laboratories represented less than half that of United Phonographs, the former became the more ambitious enterprise. In 1918 the firm obtained a license to do business in New York. Poetic license on the part of industry trade sheets soon followed. Under the guise of printing a news item, *The Phonograph And Talking Machine Weekly* of October 9, 1918 gave Paramount its first puff piece: *The New York Recording Laboratories, Inc., whose recording laborato-*

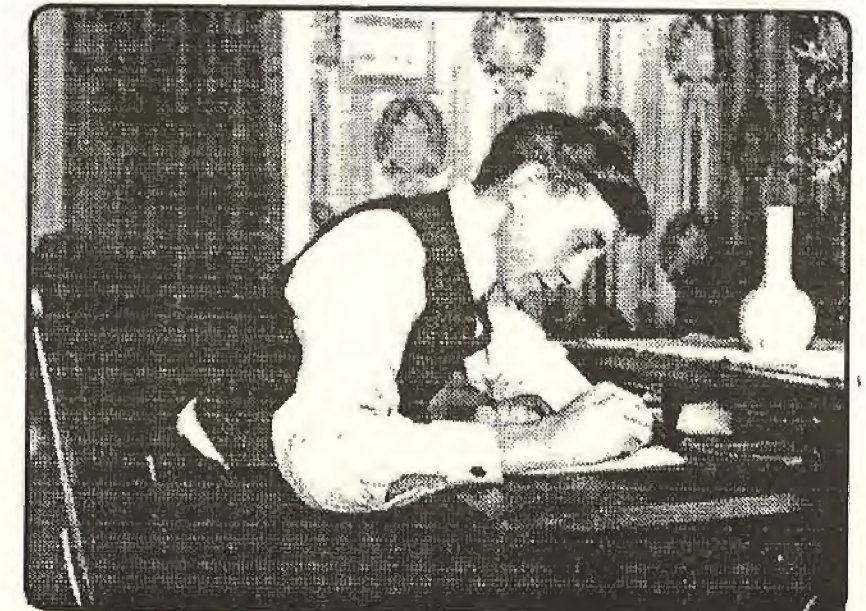


(from the collection of SHERMAN TOLIN)

Two early Paramounts show an eagle perched on a victrola. The one at right has a diameter of only 9 and a half inches and a black label.

ries are in New York City, with a record factory in Port Washington, Wis., have commenced quantity production of the Paramount Record after long and careful preparation toward that end. The company's officials have spent the past several months both in research work and in the equipping and stocking at Port Washington of one of the largest record plants in the country. Well-known artists have been chosen and the company's supplements show expert musical selective ability from among the offerings of the day as well as the classics. That the records embrace unusual variety is indicated by their prices, which range from 65 cents to \$1.25 of the double-disc type and liberal discounts with prompt deliveries are to become features of the manufacturer's policy, it is announced.

Pitching directly to wholesalers and retailers, Paramount placed three full page ads in the monthly *Talking Machine Journal* during 1919, boasting of "Artists the record buyers know—Billy Murray, Henry Burr, Arthur Fields, Helen Clark..." They were also artists the top companies shunned. Already the company had fallen prey to the industry's catch-22. Without a roster of prestigious artists, it could not attract retailers, and without retailers, it could not afford or attract prestigious artists. Yet by this time the company's hopes, as the emphasis of *The Phonograph* item indicated, rested on recording rather than pho-



(photo courtesy FRED SUPPER)

A young Maurice Supper—"The shrewdest man up there was Supper," Mayo Williams recalled."

nograph manufacture. None of the six Vista models it produced were successful, and their designer, William H. Thommen, had already jumped ship. A Chair Company designer since the 1890s, Thommen had created the cabinets the company had produced for Edison; in December of 1918, he became a Paramount rival by co-founding the Phonograph Improvement Corporation of Port Washington. Six months later his company would re-

locate in Plymouth, Wisconsin and change its name to the Plymouth Phonograph Corporation, there to do business (as a phonograph manufacturer and distributor of radio parts and Pathe Records) until 1932. Whatever the reasons for Thommen's defection, he was not considered a pivotal employee, at least by Otto Moeser.

One of the two Paramount employees Moeser regarded as indispensable was Maurice Albert Sup-



(photo courtesy FRED SUPPER)

Early 1920s: Maurice and Viola Supper
at home in Port Washington...

per (1890-1943), a quick-witted man of German and French descent who acted as the company's general manager, sales manager, pressing plant manager, and nominal recording director between 1918-1925. "The shrewdest man up there was Supper," Mayo Williams recalled. "You'd seldom see Moeser because Supper did all of the business." Music was not among Supper's interests, except as a means to an end; even during a casual lunch his small talk revolved around money-making schemes. "I don't know whether I would call him a gambling type or what," the wife of Henry Stephany said, "but 'Sup' was very interested in making money." The son of an Indianapolis cabinet-maker and wood finisher, Supper had been a racetrack driver in youth and, his son Frederick reports, all but "grew up on the Indianapolis speedways." He had settled in Port Washington after marrying a local girl in June of 1916, and had come to the chair company by way of the Gilson-Bolens Manufacturing Company, a local concern that produced roofing, power lawnmowers, and the like. He was trained as a draftsman and mechanical engineer, and turned these talents to account by designing Paramount's trademark (an eagle whose talons held the

globe, registered in October, 1917) and its first recording studio, a cubbyhole in a fifteen-story office building located at Broadway and 27th Street in Manhattan.⁶ When the studio opened early in 1918 the headquarters of Tin Pan Alley was situated a block northwards, and it was to this market that Paramount catered.

Though located in Port Washington, Supper served as the nominal recording director of the New York studio.⁷ After he succeeded a man named H.L. Combs as Paramount's sales manager in 1919, the company's recording was left largely in the hands of Arthur Edward Satherley (b. 1889), an English emigé who had married one of the Dennett daughters and held a desk job with the chair company before his transfer to New York. "Satherley didn't know a thing about records till he got with somebody else," Harry Charles would say of him. "When he was with Paramount, I don't think he knew a nickel's worth...I don't know why they hired him."⁸

The conditions Satherley and Supper (who lined up the company's early jobbers) confronted in the early 1920s would have discouraged careerists with large organizations at their disposal.

The wartime surge in record sales had been a freak occurrence; beginning with the post-war depression of 1921, sales slumped drastically. Though perceived as an inexplicable aberration, the recession actually represented a return to normalcy in the record business.

Despite its forty-year pedigree as a miraculous toy, the phonograph had never insinuated with an American public that relished frivolous mechanical gadgets and novelties; to no one was it "poetry and tragedy, love and heroism," as the automobile was to George Babbitt. Even before the postwar recession, its peak annual sales of \$106 million (attained in 1921) amounted to a fraction of movie receipts, which reached \$800 million in 1920. In a country of 105 million people, only six million phonographs had been sold by 1920. At the same time, some 35 million people flocked to the movies each week, while the tottering Chataqua circuit had managed to draw some 40 million spectators as late as 1919. By 1924, the number of cars in use surpassed the phonograph population by more than two to one. The phonograph industry was destined to fare worse than the automobile, movie, or radio indus-



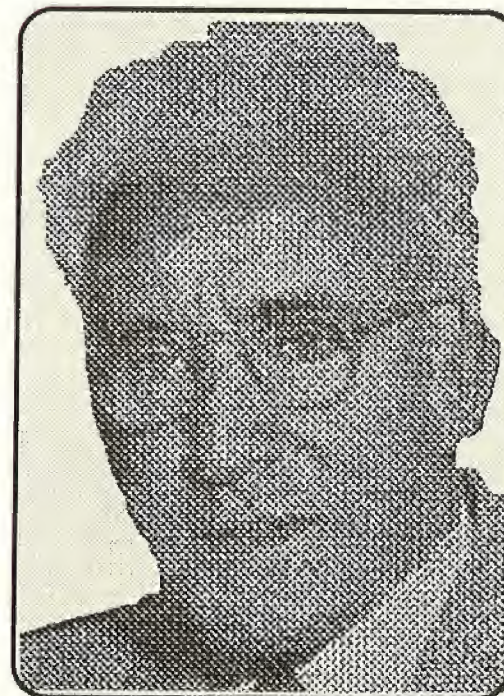
(photo courtesy FRED SUPPER)

Supper's wife, Viola:
played piano and organ.
She is credited with discovering
some of Paramount's early talent...



(photo courtesy STEPHEN GALT)

Supper designed Paramount's
trademark above (registered
in October, 1917)



(photo courtesy STEPHEN GALT)

Art Satherley (early 1940s)—
'I don't know why
they hired him.'

The Talking Machine Journal noted: "In designing a record label the aim is by no means decoration. It is chiefly to permit the maximum amount of information to be given in the clearest possible manner and at the same time to embody prominently the trademark of the concern that is issuing the record. So, in record labels today we have shown prominently the Red Rooster of the Pathé Company; the G-clef of the Emerson; the little furry kitten of the Lyric; the Bird of the Cardinal; the Dog of the Victor; and the Eagle of the Paramount..."⁹

tries after the stock market crash.

The potential appeal of phonographs and records was constricted by their exorbitant expense: At a time when movies generally cost a quarter, a three minute record designed to have a life-span of between fifty and one hundred plays was three or four times as expensive. The average phonograph of the early 1920s cost \$100, and the emphasis of industry pitchmen was always placed on the most ostentatious available model. A quality phonograph cost in the neighborhood of \$750, which exceeded the 1918 American per capita income by \$164 and would represent 37% of the average family income of 1930, which was actually attained by only one family in ten. When the National Retail Dry Goods Association surveyed retailers in the summer of 1922 to determine the cause of poor

sales, it was reported: "Several stores expressed the opinion that phonographs were essentially a luxury commodity, and the curtailed purchasing power of the public reacting against luxuries has, therefore, directly affected the sale of these articles...The high price of phonograph records was another complaint made by the stores for decreased sales."

'Records...a nuisance to those
who produced them...'

Even during the 1920s records were still regarded as a petty ornament of phonographs. Record executives could not entertain the notion that people bought phonographs in order to play records; because phonographs yielded greater profits than records (attaining sales of \$72 million as against \$20 million for the records in 1924), it was believed that customers bought records for the sake of operating their victrolas. Records were almost a nuisance to those who produced them; once purchased, it was hoped that they would be discarded as quickly as possible. As one salesman lamented: *The phonograph business has come to the place where the accumulation of records in the home is a real problem...some workable way of removing the outdated and out-worn merchandise must be devised. Why not get the 'junk-man' interested in old records...?*⁹

Because the industry placed no value on recording as an end in itself, it had developed no stars of its own in the fashion of Hollywood. Its leading attractions came second-hand, from the vaudeville circuit. Its musical material was largely provided by Tin pan Alley. Despite a litany of quack industry claims to the contrary, its recorded performances were crude acoustic caricatures of live performances.

Phonograph companies resorted to three strategies to arrest their shrinking markets of the early 1920s. The first consisted of competitive pricing, which had been the revolutionary gambit of the industry's first successful renegade, Emerson. This long-forgotten label (which evolved into the radio manufacturer of that name) made its debut in mid-1916 with a seven-inch disc that sold for twenty-five cents

(along with a single-sided ten cent item) instead of the prevailing dollar. In its first year Emerson reaped sales of \$590,000 and raised industry hackles by demonstrating that the records sold by Victor, Columbia, and Edison were an artificial luxury. Its success was sufficient to cause Victor's president and founding father Eldrige Reeves Johnson to fulminate against "The right to buy at the lowest figure that the most cunning mind can conspire...to ring from a fettered industry" and to darkly insinuate that price-cutting was a devious Oriental subterfuge. The ultimate victims of low-cost records, Johnson piously warned, were not record executives but the poor: "When prices are too low...the poor suffer most because of the curses of lack of employment, namely hunger, cold, disease, and crime." Although the newly-formed Gennett label appeared on the market with a seventy-five cent record in June of 1916, the established firms continued to resist price-cutting, except as a final, desperate resort in the face of skidding sales. Even when the seventy-five cent record became standard in the early 1920s industry propagandists tarnished the image of cheaper labels to such an extent that Emerson felt constrained to issue a policy statement in February of 1923 that it had "completely divorced itself from a lower priced record under any name, label, or camouflage of any kind." Though the steep price of records was the chief cause of the industry's total collapse during the Depression, the *Talking Machine Journal* boasted as late as 1932 of its "twelve year campaign against cheap records."

Otto Heineman—
founder of
Okeh. He began on a
"\$500 shoestring."

(photo courtesy STEPHEN CALT)



Mamie Smith in 1920. Heineman: "giving the public something different."

Another means of increasing record sales was to offer a competitive product by departing from tried-and-true recording trends. The only label that could claim real originality in this area was Okeh, which appeared in June of 1918. Its distinctive character reflected the independent outlook of its German-born founder

and president, Otto Heineman (1877-1965), an industry pioneer who had originally founded his own company in Berlin on a \$500 shoestring in 1902 and later became manager of the Carl Lindstrom Company, which produced Europe's best-selling Odeon label. After being stranded in America during a business trip that coincided with the outbreak of the war, he founded a phonograph supply company in 1915. Within five years it had grown from a two-room office to an international enterprise with two hundred office workers and salesmen in five continents. In 1920 Heineman produced the first foreign-language records by leasing products from Lindstrom; these consisted of German, Bohemian, Hungarian, Slovak, Russian, Polish, Mexican, Hebrew, and Scandinavian records, which were typically sold in department store basements, separated from the record departments of the same stores. Subsequently, Okeh recorded the first black blues vocalist (Mamie Smith, in 1920) and the first hillbilly artist (Fiddlin' John Carson, in 1923). Alluding to his "good hits such as those by Mamie Smith, the colored star," and "other numbers of an in-

novation type" in a 1921 trade interview, Heineman declared that his off-beat catalog was "proving the wisdom of giving the public something different."

A final expedient was to offer the public a technological gimmick. Thus in 1924 the ailing Emerson company threw its doors open to any musician who wanted to produce a vanity record (thus becoming, apparently, the first freelance recording studio), while Pathe would market a phonograph with aluminum discs with which a customer could make private recordings.



(from the collection of SHERMAN TOLENT)

CUSTOM PRESSING SERVICE—Paramount label on left has a light green label ("ethnic") with gold lettering (no number)—and black wax. Title: "Up De Valera"—"This record made especially for Thomas O'Dowd, New York." At right—"Molly Branigan" by John Burke (green wax, Purple label).

In general, the recording industry of the early 1920s shouldered its losses, preferring inertia to innovation. Along with movie operators and saloon-keepers, its spokesmen blamed the new-fangled radio for its reversals. Though such once-prosperous firms as Columbia, Pathe, and Emerson had fallen into receivership, less experienced competitors were blamed for the industry's hard times. In January of 1922, Heineman declared: "We have not only had an over-production, but we had also what was worse, many companies in our trade...which called themselves phonograph concerns without knowing the least detail about the machine or record business."

Paramounts described as
'defective'—'worthless'

Heineman's words would have made a fitting obituary for Paramount, had it persisted as a pop label. By Otto Moeser's own reckoning: "Our early losses were due to the fact that we did not know how to make records and had to experiment too much, building from the ground up."

In an effort to bolster a business it had yet to master, Paramount began advertising a record-plating, pressing, and recording service in the



(photo courtesy STEPHEN CALT)

Okeh factory workers—"we did not know how to make records."

July, 1921 issue of *The Talking Machine Journal*. In short order it garnished an insignificant Milwaukee concern known as the Polonia Phonograph Company as a customer. This transaction landed the parties in court. After signing a \$1600 promissory note on July 7, 1921 for something like 5000 "First-class phonograph" records (probably intended for the Polish market), Polonia found that those so delivered were all defective and worthless...promptly upon the discovery of the worthless condition of said records (Polonia) notified the said [New York] Laboratories...the Laboratories refused and still refuses to exchange the worthless records...¹⁰

In all probability, the company's failure to replace its products arose from the fact that the records Polonia considered "worthless" were its standard "first-class" product. Paramounts were poorly manufactured, and the company had no qualms about issuing defective records containing uneven (or virtually non-existent) rims.

"When he'd go downtown
he was colored;
when he'd go uptown
he was white."

Although Paramount's ads implied expertise in the field of recording "popular or standard selections," its only ongoing customer was a company devoted exclusively to black talent: Black Swan. Black Swan was the one quixotic label of its time. Formed on a \$5,000 shoestring in January, 1921, it aimed to provide a rostrum for what the *Chicago Defender* termed "higher class" black talent and counted W.E.B. DuBois among its board of directors. Its founder, Harry Herbert Pace (b. 1884), had taught Latin and Greek at a Missouri trade school before entering the insurance business in Atlanta and becoming a publishing partner of W.C. Handy. "When he'd go downtown he was colored; when he'd go uptown he was white," ragtime composer Eubie Blake said of him.



Black Swan—Paramount's only ongoing customer...

Lacking its own studio and pressing plant, the company hired Paramount to produce and press its products. Although Black Swan folded after three years and ninety releases, its ads holding itself out as the only label catering exclusively to blacks had a revolutionary effect on the recording policies of the period. It was probably as a means of undercutting the company's claims of marketing exclusively that Okeh Records launched a "race" series in August of 1921, the month that Black Swan's initial ads graced the trade papers.



Black Swan featured 'higher class' black talent on this red and gold label 6000 series...

Paramount loses \$100,000

Despite its ancillary Black Swan trade, Paramount had yet to show any profits in the record business. By 1922 its losses amounted to \$100,000. Then M.A. Supper decided to convert Paramount to a "race" recording label. As Moeser would matter-of-factly explain: "We could not compete for high class talent with Edison, Columbia, and Victor, and we had inferior records: so we went to race records." □

PENALTY IF NOT FILED BY APRIL, FIRST. NO EXTENSION OF TIME CAN BE GRANTED

ANNUAL REPORT
DOMESTIC CORPORATION

To the Secretary of State,
State of Wisconsin:

1. Name of corporation... *The New York Recording Laboratories*

2. Location of corporation... *Port Washington, Wis.*

3. Names and addresses of the officers and directors of the corporation:

TITLE	NAME	ADDRESS
Pres.	J.M. Bostwick	Port Washington, Wisconsin.
Vice Pres.	E.J. Barrett	Sosboygan, Wisconsin
Treas.	J.R. Dornott	Port Washington, Wis.
Sec'y	C.A. Moeser	Port Washington, Wis.
Director	Same as above	Port Washington, Wis.

4. Amount of authorized capital stock, Common \$10,000.00 Preferred \$

5. Total amount of capital subscribed and paid in assets, property and earnings:

6. Was said corporation engaged in actual business during the past year? *No*

7. Nature of business transacted during the past year

8. If corporation is required to transact business in any other state as a foreign corporation, state where

9. This corporation has not entered into any combination, conspiracy, trust, pool, agreement or contract to restrain or prevent competition in the supply or sale of any article or commodity for use in this state, or constituting a subject of trade or commerce therein, or which shall in any manner limit the price of any such article or commodity to the above stated limit or fix the number or quantity thereof to be manufactured, mined, produced or sold in said state, or fix any standard or figure by which its price to the public shall be in any manner controlled or established.

In Witness Whereof, said *The New York Recording Laboratories*
Name of Corporation
has caused its corporate seal to be affixed and its name to be hereto attested.
This is the 12th day of February, A.D. 1924.

Attn: (Corporate Seal) here

Name of Officer Signing and Title

Execute verification on reverse side of blank.

(courtesy NICK PERLS)

No business transacted in 1923 says
Paramount's 1924 Annual Report

Footnotes:

¹ Bostwick appears to have become connected to the chair company purely as an investor; he was not an astute businessman, at least in regards to small matters. On April Fool's Day of 1897 he signed a life insurance policy without bothering to read it. Five months later he noticed that the policy was the same one he had refused to purchase from the salesman who offered it to him, and sued for recovery of his premiums.

² A.B. Patton and C.L. Vaughn: *Furniture: Frederick J. Drake & Co., Wilmette, Ill.*, p.165.

³ A court decision involving Dennett's estate alluded to the chair company's "large profits in 1918, 1919, and first part of 1920..."; it was such prosperity that no doubt occasioned its investment in a record company subsidiary.

⁴ Of the \$100,000 worth of stock the Wisconsin Chair Company issued at that time, \$40,000 worth was purchased by Dennett's daughter Julia Barrett and \$20,000 worth by his wife Clara. Other investors included J.M. Bostwick (\$20,000), the President of the Port Washington State Bank, Clarence Hill (who purchased \$5,000 worth of stock), and another business associate, C. C. Henry (who likewise bought \$5,000 worth).

⁵ Recounted in an interview with Gayle Wardlow and Stephen Calt.

⁶ The studio engineer was a man named Harry Marker, who had formerly been the head of Emerson's recording department.

⁷ It has been reported that Supper's wife Viola, who played organ and piano, found some of Paramount's early talent.

⁸ Interview with Gayle Wardlow.
⁹ *Talking Machine Journal*: March, 1923. Another article advised: "Break Your Worn Out Records."

¹⁰ From the Supreme Court of Wisconsin's decision in *Port Washington State Bank vs. Polonia Phonograph Company et al.*, March 6, 1923.

(part 2—The Mayo Williams Era will appear in the next issue...)

A special note of thanks to Fred Supper and Sherman Tolen—To Fred Supper for sending photographs and new information—and to Sherman Tolen for sending us the Paramount 78s from his collection.



(photo by RUSS SHOR)

TREV BENWELL

"Man and Legend"

by Russ Shor

"If God wanted LP's to be collectible, he would have made them breakable."

The wisdom of Trev Benwell, editor of the venerable Vintage Jazz Mart is rarely evident in print... his magazine is too filled with record lists to permit much philosophy.

Just how filled?

Since he started VJM 35 years ago in 1953, Trev estimates that more than a million records have been listed under the familiar "Offers Invited" headings - easily more than a million. He hasn't kept count, but he's typed them all into the book himself.

At 35, VJM is by far the longest running publication catering to record collectors of any sort and, given the tenuous nature of other record publications (sorry Pete), it is unlikely that VJM's longevity record will ever be equalled.

The success of VJM is due to four factors:

- Trev's dedication to keeping it independent.
- His willingness to put in a lot of hours typing collector's lists and mailing the magazine to thousands of subscribers for little financial reward.
- Its acceptance as THE medium of selling and trading by two or three generations of collectors. (The cheapest ad rates in the world don't hurt).
- Its "ambience" or what a friend of mine calls "creative clutter". What other magazine in the world corrects mistakes by overtyping a bunch of X's on the offending portion?

The real reason lies in the first two factors.

Trev and Betty, his wife of 44 years, are perhaps the most hospitable folks on two continents. And his object at the outset was to serve record collectors, not rake in a fortune. Both reveal a very giving nature.

It takes such a giving spirit to

spend countless hours in front of an old typewriter typing up hundreds of record lists for a grand total of about \$20 per page; and that's today's rates. Some of the lists submitted are as unintelligible as the label of a P+ Paramount. Then, on occasion, there are some collectors who want \$100 worth of service for a \$20 ad.

"My only diversion doing these lists", he wrote recently, "is changing 'shuffle' to 'shovel' and Lombardo to 'Lumbago'."

That amount of work and occasional hassle on top of a full time job by the British Ministry of Aviation would drive most people into another, much easier endeavor within a year or two. Not him.

He's enormously proud of the hard work he's put into VJM and its success.

"In the history of jazz collecting, more records have changed hands through VJM than any other publication or list. I'm very proud of that."



(photo by RUSS SHOR)

Trev and wife Betty at VJM "Command Center"
4 Hillcrest Gardens, Dollis Hill, London...

'78's used to grow on trees.
even American labels.'

Trev started collecting records in 1932 when he was 12 years old. Fletcher Henderson and Clarence Williams were favorites early on and remain so today.

Much of his jazz upbringing came at the #1 Rhythm Club in London's Oxford Circus which started in 1936.

"They used to have marvelous visitors like Spencer Williams, Benny Morton, Eva Taylor ... a great place to learn jazz."

He started COLLECTING records (as opposed to just buying them in record shops) in 1936 when he bought a couple of Paramount's from Jake Schneider for \$4 or \$5 each.

"That was when record collecting started to get serious. People were beginning to send them across international borders."

It remains a mystery to him that it's always been the Europeans—Delaunay, Rust, Dixon in particular—who developed the first and only standard discographies used by collectors today.

"It amazed me then, and still does, that U.S. collectors let a world of information die in front of them."

Records stopped trading over most international borders after September 1939. That's also when Trev had to swap his listening sessions for sessions in pilot training classes.

In 1940 he became a member of that legendary band of warriors, the Spitfire pilots who were England's last defense at the Battle of Britain.

"I started active service during the latter part of that battle. After that I was sent to the West African campaign."

The bond with man and aircraft remains strong.

The living room of his house is divided between his two passions: records and music memorabilia and mementos of years in the RAF. On his coffee table is a book authored by one of his comrades listing the whereabouts of every surviving Spitfire, including photos of most of them. An oil rendering of a Spitfire

squadron in flight takes the place of honor over his fireplace and he keeps a group picture of his comrades in arms by his table.

The West African campaign gave him a bit of a chance to combine his passions: "I met Herman Chittison in Cairo ... and once on the Libyan desert. I heard somebody whistling a Bix tune behind me. I turned around and introduced myself. the chap's name was Bert Wyatt and we've been friends ever since."

A crash on that desert ended his RAF career. He was invalided out in 1944 and began working for the Ministry of Aviation.

Moving ahead nine years to 1953, he started VJM as a monthly.

It was, in some ways, easier to produce then.

"The records were better. People back then didn't recognize Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller as jazz."

For the first issues, he listed all records alphabetically by artist with the sellers' code number. He dropped that idea after a short while.

'Lp's run at illegal speeds—'

In 1958 his job with the Aviation Ministry forced him to cut VJM back to a quarterly and creeping "Lp—ism" forced another change: the colored MJM section.

"I had to do something," says Trev queuing up one of his favorite Georgians 78's on his turntable. "People were including more and more LP's in their lists. I had to end this "contamination" and banish

them to a separate section in the back. They're there to this day."

In 1964 he put a new cover on the magazine featuring gold colored stock and the windup phonograph. He hasn't changed it since.

The decades have taken their toll: Lists which once were packed with King Olivers, Cannon Jugs and Blind Blakes started giving way to Harry James and Glenn Miller. He's tried to fight the avalanche of sleazy shellac with some success. But that leads to another problem.

'What happens if there are more records than people to collect them?'

Many of the several thousand VJM subscribers (10% of his charter subscribers are still active) are advanced collectors who have most of the classic jazz items. His readers complain that oft' times fine records by Clarence Williams, Jelly Roll Morton and all the other favorites fail to attract serious bids.

"We need now blood coming in to this fold", he says. "If you know a young collector, indoctrinate him into the classics."

Today, VJM comes out twice yearly and goes to 60 countries (Japan is the fastest growing). He says he will keep putting it out as long as it's wanted by collectors. And, for those who give records an E- grade even though they look as if they have been left out on a well-travelled highway; he has this last bit of wisdom:

'Overgraders lack proper breeding.'

VJM cover
has stayed
the same
since 1964

78 Quarterly
sadly regrets to
announce the
sudden passing
of Trev's wife,
Betty Benwell, in
the Spring of
1988.



(courtesy—
KIP LORNELL
and
BLUE RIDGE
INSTITUTE
FERRUM COLLEGE)

Old South Quartette, c. 1903

POLK MILLER and The Old South Quartette by Doug Seroff

Prologue

Polk Miller and his Old South Quartette have already been the subject of two published articles; one written by the late Jim Walsh, which appeared in *Hobbies* (January, 1960) and one which I wrote, that was published in *JEMF Quarterly* (Fall/Winter, 1982). In his *Hobbies* article, Walsh reprinted letters received from Mrs. Virginia Miller Chewning, Polk Miller's daughter, mentioning that she had retained "scrapbooks of programs" which had originally belonged to her father. Visiting Richmond late in 1980, Ray Funk traced the scrapbooks to Mrs. Chewning's son, Alexander Neal, of Richmond. During the summer of 1981, I visited Mr. Neal and he was kind enough to allow me to borrow these scrapbooks. Before I returned the scrapbooks to Mr. Neal, they were microfilmed for the permanent collection of the Country Music Foundation Library and Media Center in Nashville. These scrapbooks, were assembled, for the most part, during the 1890s; they include press commentary, advertising and promotional material, programmes, endorsements, personal correspondence and considerable miscellany, of varying interest. The original scrapbooks are now part of the collection of the Valentine Historical Museum, in Richmond.

Part One

Polk Miller was born near Burkeville, in Prince Edward County, Virginia, on August 2, 1844. His father owned a large plantation with many slaves. Polk Miller's fascination with black culture first manifest itself during his youth, much of which he reportedly spent in the company of his father's slaves.

Miller enlisted in the Confederate Army and served as a private in the First Virginia Artillery, which surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse in 1865. After the war, he began to establish himself in the City of Richmond, where he eventually built up a very successful drug busi-



Polk Miller

"Indeed, I wouldn't tell anybody that I even 'knewed how' to play the banjo..."

ness and began an animal remedies company. He was well known around Richmond as a sportsman, dog lover and crack shot; Miller was President of the Virginia Field Sport Association and a talented journalist, songwriter, collector of Southern folk tales and a banjo picker.

Polk Miller first took the public platform in 1892, at benefit concerts in and around Richmond. He wrote a revealing autobiographical sketch at this time, which appeared in a Richmond newspaper in August 1892. "I was raised on a plantation where 'niggers' were thicker than hops, and it was there that I learned to 'pick upon de ole banjo'. On coming to Richmond to 1860, and entering upon the career of druggist, I was soon so mixed up in 'physics' that I didn't have time to keep up with my music.

"Indeed, I wouldn't tell anybody that I even 'knewed how' to play the banjo, because it was looked upon as a 'nigger insterment,' (sic) and beneath the notice of the 'cultivated.' For years I longed for the time when it would 'come in fashion' and I could play on my favorite musical instrument without disgracing myself in the eyes of my city friends..."

"I do play the 'nigger banjer,' and now and then as I pass along the road...I delight in getting behind a Negro cabin and singing a plantation melody 'jes' to see 'em come a crallin' out to see who is dat out dar a-playin' on dat banjer."

In 1893, at the age of forty-nine, Polk Miller decided to abandon his successful drug business and embark on a career as an itinerant "darkey dialectician" and "banjoist." Visiting New York City in February 1894, Miller "leaped into fame," when, following a performance he gave at the University Club, he was



Polk Miller (c. 1903)

Mark Twain: his 'stories are the best I ever heard.'

called from the audience by Mark Twain, to come to the stage during an "author's reading," given in Madison Square Garden, February 27, 1894. In making his introduction, Twain is reported to have said: "Mr. Miller is thoroughly competent to entertain you with his sketches of the old-time Negro, and I not only commend him to your intelligent notice but personally endorse him. The stories I have heard him tell are the best I ever heard."² Publicity from his New York triumph helped launch Polk Miller's successful stage career. From 1894 thru 1899, Miller toured extensively. The bulk of his traveling was in the Southeastern states, but he ventured as far north as Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York State, and as far west as Texas.

Polk Miller gave his entertainments in public halls, in hotels, sometimes in churches; he often

appeared at Confederate reunions, Chautauqua assemblies, business conventions, etc. Miller gave many benefit concerts, often for Confederate benevolent organizations and monument committees.

A partial repertoire, gleaned from programmes, reviews and other materials preserved in Miller's scrapbooks, show he performed several Negro spirituals and also white hymns; "Rise And Shine," "Golden Slippers," "Keep In De Middle Ob De Road," "Jordan Is A Hard Road To Travel," "Hold Fast To The Baptist Hoe." It's possible that some of these religious songs were performed with banjo and others a cappella.

Miller's repertoire included an interesting variety of folk and popular banjo tunes and plantation melodies, such as "Watermelon Smiling On The Vine," "Arkansas Traveler," "Run, Nigger, Run," "Little Log Cabin In The Lane," "The Alabama Coon,"

"Go Tell All The Coons I'm Gone," "Old Mississippi Sawyer," "Gwine Back To Dixie," "Swanee River," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Carry Me Back To Old Virginny." There are also songs of Miller's own composition, "The Huckleberry Picnic," "Going Back To Ole Virginny," and others. Some of the songs in Miller's repertoire are unfamiliar to me, but have interesting sounding titles, "Telephone The News On High," "The Mississippi Side," "Down On The Farm." Finally, there was "The Bonnie Blue Flag," the famous Confederate anthem.

The subject of Miller's program during this era was "The Old Issue Darkey," or "The Old Virginia Plantation Negro," as his performances were often billed. Miller recreated the black slave characters of his nostalgic youth, with banjo songs, dialect stories and lecture, without the use of blackface or farcical exaggeration. His stage presentation was too sincere and erudite to be considered garden variety minstrelsy. Indeed Miller asserted: "The word



Promotional literature (mid-1890's)

... from Polk Miller's Scrapbooks

... PROGRAM

Polk Miller and his "Plantation Darkies" in the amusing and educational (to the young) sketch of "Old Times Down South."

Introductory Remarks by	- - - - -	Mr. Polk Miller.
Run Nigger Run (old time negro), Banjo Solo	- - - - -	Mr. Polk Miller.
Gwine Back to Georgia (Invisible Chorus)	- - - - -	Quartette.
Shout'n Mourners	- - - - -	Anderson Epes.
Give Me a Home in the Dear Old South	- - - - -	Archie Johnson.
Stories in Negro Dialect (his own, and inimitably told)	- - - - -	Mr. Polk Miller.

Anderson Epes will introduce up-to-date "Coon Songs," in which others of the Quartette will join in the Choruses.

Mr. Miller will lead in some of the popular songs of the plantation days in Old Virginia, and the Quartette will sing the Choruses. There is an almost endless repertoire of these old songs, but the most popular ones are used.

Mississippi Sawyer, the Old Virginia Reel tune, and the calling out of the figures, in imitation of the old darkey who belonged to his father, by Mr. Miller, is an exact reproduction of a scene which will bring back recollections of the old times to people who lived before the war.

The Arkansas Traveller, too (description of its origin), is given by Mr. Miller with the Banjo accompaniment.

Dialect Stories, Songs and Recitations follow each other in quick succession, making an entertainment of about two hours' duration. There are no disagreeable waits for the shifting of scenery and no letting down of curtains during the performance.



POLK MILLER was born in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in August, 1844. Coming out of the Confederate Army after the surrender at Appomattox, he entered the drug business in Richmond, and is at this time the President of the Polk Miller Drug Company and the Polk Miller-Childrey Company, two of the handsomest and best appointed drug concerns in the South, doing a large business on the two principal streets (Main and Broad) of the Capital City of Virginia. Raised as he was on a large plantation, on which there were two hundred negroes, and in a section of his State where there were more negroes than in any other portion of the State, he knows the negro, and in his rendition of the Songs, Recitations and Stories his dialect is so true to life that General Fitz Lee says of him, "when I hear him and don't see him, I can not be persuaded that he is not a genuine negro talking." On his father's plantation, from infancy to manhood (21 years), he heard the banjo and the fiddle played by the negroes in the cabins, and having learned to play the banjo in his boyhood, he has no superior in that line (old time negro style) on the American stage. When Joel Chandler Harris (Uncle Remus) heard him for the first time, he wrote to his paper (Atlanta Constitution) that "when Polk Miller plays you may look for a live nigger to jump out of his banjo." The correct idea of plantation life in the "Old South" can better be learned from an evening with him than from all the books that have been written on the subject.

(courtesy: Rip Lornell and Blue Ridge Institute)

Page from Polk Miller and his Old South Quartette program brochure, late 1903.

In an "Invisible Chorus," such as "Gwine Back to Georgia," the soloist on-stage (in this case, Polk Miller), began the song and the group, concealed off-stage, behind a curtain or prop, chimed in unexpectedly and unseen, at the chorus.

Two Old Confederates
IN
OLD TIMES DOWN SOUTH

An Evening of Old Plantation and War Time Stories and Songs

Mr. Polk Miller ASSISTED BY Col. "Tom" Booker
of Richmond, Va. AND of Amelia County, Va.

Mr. Miller's Famous Quartette of Old Virginia Negroes

(courtesy of Alexander Neal—Polk Miller Scrapbooks)

Front page of program brochure (c.1910)

'show' as some people call my entertainments, was always nauseating to me, and I hated the name, for if it were merely that and nothing more, no one would have ever seen me on the platform."

Nineteenth century "Negro dialect" grates on some modern sensibilities, yet Paul Laurence Dunbar, the great turn-of-the-century black poet, demonstrated that word pictures of the slave cabins and fields could be rendered in characteristic dialect with dignity and artistry. The Fisk Jubilee Singers and other university-affiliated singers, preserved dialect in their spiritual song renderings; the use of dialect was not, in itself, considered offensive in that day. Of course, the contemptuous term "nigger" has always been offensive, and there were other elements of Miller's entertainment that were calculated to provoke his forward-

looking black contemporaries.

To really begin to understand Polk Miller, we must recognize that he saw himself as an apologist for the institution of slavery. Miller avowed, "it has been my aim to vindicate the slave-holding class against the charge of cruelty and inhumanity to the Negro of the old time." While Miller extolled the virtues of his "old order" Negro, he attempted to glorify the "old order" itself. Miller had many discouraging words for black people, many dire predictions about the ultimate consequences of freedom. He liked to argue that the enslaved generations were morally superior and better adapted than his "aspiring" black contemporaries of the 1890s.

Conversely, Polk Miller proudly advertised himself as a performer on the "nigger banjo." His scrapbooks, though mired in racial epithet, preserve a compelling study of a direct

I'M BORN TO OLD VIRGINIA.

POLK MILLER.

RICHMOND MUSIC CO.,
PUBLISHERS.

No. 1 R. Road St., RICHMOND, Va.

Oct. 18th, 1891.

Has been the subject of Mr. Polk Miller's songs and stories for many years. The name of the author as well as the intrinsic merit of the music should be remembered to every man with a love for the South and its traditions.

Yours sincerely,
Geo. Gordon H. H. H.

(from Polk Miller's Scrapbooks.)
(see close-up on next page)

transmission of black folk banjo style, from plantation slave banjo players to Polk Miller. Suggestively, Miller's repertoire during the 1890s bears a striking resemblance to the recorded output of Uncle Dave Macon and other country banjo artists of the 1920s.

According to banjo scholar Robert B. Winans, "The banjo itself was brought to this country from Africa by blacks and was played almost exclusively by them until the 1830s. I have been unable to find any references to white banjo players prior to the 1830s." Detailed studies by Dena J. Epstein, James Everett and others, document the black origins of the five-string banjo and the characteristic clawhammer style. There are many early references to black banjo playing, including a report written in Richmond, which dates back to 1799: "After going to bed I was entertained with an agreeable serenade, by a black man who had his stand near the Tavern, and for the amusement of those of his colour, sung and played on the Banjo (sic)... Its wild notes of melody seem to correspond with the state of Civilization where this species of music originated."

After the initial wave of white

I'M GOIN TO OLE VIRGINNY.

89 BY
RICHMOND'S POPULAR BANJOIST AND SONGSTER,

POLK MILLER.

It is rich in Melody and full of Pathos.
Everybody should have it.
Price, 40 cents.

RICHMOND MUSIC CO.,

PUBLISHERS,

No. 7 E. Broad St., RICHMOND, Va.

NEW YORK SOUTHERN SOCIETY,

18 W. 25th Street,

Oct. 15th, 1893.

The song composed by Mr. Polk Miller has been duly received. Please accept the sincere thanks of the Society for your courtesy. The name of the author as well as the intrinsic merits of the music should commend it to every man with a love for the South and its traditions.

Yours sincerely,

GEO. GORDON BATTLE,
Secretary.

This song is sold by the Richmond Music Co. on a royalty of 5¢ a copy - same.

Promotional letter from
Miller's manager forecasts
success in Texas...

(from Polk Miller's scrapbooks—courtesy of
Alexander Neal)

(from Polk Miller's Scrapbooks.)

TEXAS ENTERTAINMENT BUREAU,

Brownwood, Texas, April 9, 1895.

MY DEAR SIR:

You will notice from the enclosed circular that Polk Miller will appear at Houston at the Assembly Hall three successive nights during the Ex-Confederate reunion. After that engagement he will give his recital at a few places in Texas, during the next two weeks. The Houston engagement for three nights is in itself a high endorsement of Mr. Miller, and it will be certain to give him very favorable press notices throughout the state. Then every person who hears him at Houston will tell the people at home about Miller, for he undoubtedly captures the people wherever he appears. His entertainment is not a lecture but is, as he calls it, rather "An Evening of Story and Song," introducing the old time plantation negro, now fast passing away, with his inimitable songs and banjo playing. Mr. Miller is a member of the R. E. Lee Camp of Ex-Confederates, Richmond, Va., and he usually gives his lecture under the auspices of Ex-Confederate Camp, Daughters of the Confederacy, monument association or some similar organization. At St. Louis on January 12th, he appeared for the Daughters of the Confederacy to a \$1200 audience, and always, when proper management is given, he draws large audiences. If proper auspices can be agreed upon for managing him in your city, Mr. Miller will come there, pay his own hotel expenses, railroad fare and furnish lithographs and circulars, and will make liberal terms to the committee engaging him. If you are interested and can give the matter attention, kindly write to me at once, or, if not, please refer this to the best local parties for managing Mr. Miller's recital, with request that they correspond with me regarding Mr. Miller's entertainment in your city.

Respectfully,

WILL H. MAYES, Manager.

(Polk Miller's Scrapbooks)

...POLK MILLER.

Dialect Recital and Character Sketches

"The Old Virginia Plantation Negro."

He takes you back to old times in the South, tells the most amusing anecdotes, showing the way of life of the negro slave, and draws delightful word-pictures of the plantation life. He also sings plantation melodies, accompanying himself on the Banjo, and gives a most characteristic recital of the "old time negro."

He has represented the people of the highest civilization and the most luxurious of the South throughout the country. He gives you just what you want to hear. This wonderful dialect recital will appear at

PUBLIC WAREHOUSE, TUESDAY, APRIL 10th at 8 P. M.
Admission, Adults, 25c. Children, 15c. Reserved Seats 10c. extra.

Mr. Miller is the greatest talent of our people essential to pay in his visit and it is of our people's interest to give him a hearty welcome. The proceeds will be devoted to relief of the poor of the city.

ENTERTAINMENT BUREAU BY THE LADIES OF THE TOWN.



Advertising and ticket of admission
for a Polk Miller recital of April, 1894...

minstrel banjo pickers emerged in the 1830s and 1840s, the instrument became very firmly associated with minstrelsy, the great nineteenth century American entertainment phenomenon. Perhaps the most influential of the pioneer white minstrel banjoists was Joel Sweeney, of Virginia, whose efforts were significant in popularizing the instrument during the 1830s and 1840s. "Sweeney claimed to have learned to play by watching and listening to slaves on his family's plantation."

Strangely, for the next forty years, white banjo picking seems to have been exclusively reserved for minstrels. According to Winans, the first signs of white banjo in the mountains of western Virginia did not occur until at least the 1870s. In this, Polk Miller was perhaps ahead of his time, he learned to play the banjo during the 1850s, without any aspirations toward professional minstrelsy.

The phenomenon of direct transmission of banjo technique from black tutor to white pupil, such as Sweeney and Miller evince, is a rich area for further research. Neither the influence of early black folk banjoists, the work of black urban music instructors, nor the impact of con-

temporary black minstrel pickers, has been fully elucidated. Black performers on stringed instruments were recognized very early on, as leaders in their field. Black mandolin societies and string orchestras were remarkably common in the North and South during the 1890s, there are numerous references to string band activity in the black community press of that decade.

Part Two

Miller assembled the quartet from men, who had been singing on the street corners... to motley crowds of hoodlums...

Sometime between August 1899 and April 1903, Polk Miller began touring with a black vocal quartet from the Richmond community, known as the Old South Quartette. Miller said he assembled the quartet from men, "...who had been singing on the street corners and in the barrooms of this city at night to motley crowds of hoodlums and barroom loafers and hanging around the hat... I could get a dozen quartettes from the good singing material

among the Negroes in the tobacco factories here."

By the 1890s, quartet singing had become a general pastime for black American youth and there is no reason to doubt Polk Miller's assertion that he could find dozens of quartets without ever having to leave Richmond. Quartet groups were flourishing in black churches, where mixed-gender "quartet-choirs" were a common phenomenon; black quartet societies were organized; quartets represented black social clubs and were conspicuously present elsewhere within black communities. It was customary for quartets to render selections at funerals, they serenaded the patrons of white hotels and resorts, engaged in singing competitions, held forth at "dime museums," and appeared at camp meetings. During the latter half of the 1890s, ragtime made its spectacular emergence on the professional stage. Vocal quartets were among the most effective early exponents of ragtime, they rode a new tidal wave of popularity.

Polk Miller and his Old South Quartette appeared in "the most exclusive social clubs in New York, Boston, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh and Cleveland. The universities, colleges, military schools

TEXAS ENTERTAINMENT BUREAU,

MY DEAR SIR:
As will be seen from the enclosed circular, Mr. Polk Miller will appear at Houston at the Assembly Hall three successive nights during the Ex-Confederate reunion. After that engagement he will give his recital at a few places in Texas, during the next two weeks. The Houston engagement for three nights is in itself a high endorsement of Mr. Miller, and it will be certain to give him very favorable press notices throughout the state. Then every person who hears him at Houston will tell the people at home about Miller, for he undoubtedly captures the people wherever he appears. His entertainment is not a lecture but is, as he calls it, rather "An Evening of Story and Song," introducing the old time plantation negro, now fast passing away, with his inimitable songs and banjo playing. Mr. Miller is a member of the R. E. Lee Camp of Ex-Confederates, Richmond, Va., and he usually gives his lecture under the auspices of Ex-Confederate Camp, Daughters of the Confederacy, monument association or some similar organization. At St. Louis on January 12th, he appeared for the Daughters of the Confederacy to a \$1200 audience, and always, when proper management is given, he draws large audiences. If proper auspices can be agreed upon for managing him in your city, Mr. Miller will come there, pay his own hotel expenses, railroad fare and furnish lithographs and circulars, and will make liberal terms to the committee engaging him. If you are interested and can give the matter attention, kindly write to me at once, or, if not, please refer this to the best local parties for managing Mr. Miller's recital, with request that they correspond with me regarding Mr. Miller's entertainment in your city.

Promotional letter from
Miller's manager forecasts
success in Texas...
(see opposite page)

LECTURE AND BALL AT Otterburn Springs.



Mr. Polk Miller will deliver his unique Lecture on the
"Old Times in the South,"
 AT OTTERBURN SPRINGS,
Friday Night, Aug. 17, at 8:30 p. m.

As to the ball, a **GRAND BALL** will be given. A special arrangement has been made with the Southern Railway Company, and the rate from all stations between Richmond and Burkeville is reduced to 10 cents.

The weather is mild, and the scenery is alluring.

Admission to Both Lecture and Ball, 25 Cts.

(from Clifton Forge Paper)

Mark Twain: "...the only thing...that is originally and utterly American."

in most parts of the North and South have been visited."

It was reported that Mark Twain heard Miller and his Negro quartet during the time that Prince Henry of Prussia was visiting the country and wrote: "I think that Prince Henry in being out West and not hearing Polk Miller and his wonderful four in Carnegie Hall last night missed about the only thing the country can furnish that is originally and utterly American."

A *Richmond Journal* reporter once questioned Polk Miller: "Didn't your men become very stuck up?" Miller replied: "Well, it was natural that after my men had shaken hands with men like Grover Cleveland, Mark Hanna, Bishop Potter and other 'big bugs,' they should have felt that they were 'some pumpkins,' but they were always respectful and considerate in their demeanor towards me."

The *Richmond Planet*, of March 5, 1910, contains mention of an appearance at Fifth Street Baptist Church (black), providing some insight into what the Old South Quartet

tette may have been doing when they were not out touring with Polk Miller: "Polk Miller's Original Quartette will sing next Tuesday night for the benefit of the Deacons' Club. Every one come out and hear them. This is the last time they will appear this season. Admission only ten cents."

Black quartets were a dominant force in turn-of-century popular entertainment, so it is no wonder they figured so prominently among black artists of the "pioneer recording era." Evidence of the proliferation of black quartets on the professional stage, shortly prior to the emergence of ragtime (c. 1896), is provided in the personnel roster of the "South Before The War," a seminal touring company in the new wave of popular black (not whites in blackface) minstrelsy. During the seasons of 1894 and 1895, the "South Before The War" carried four quartets among its entourage, a good measure of vocal harmony, which contributed significantly to the show's remarkable success. The "No. 1 quartette" of the "South Before The War," was the Standard Quartette of Chicago, which consisted of Messrs. Williams, DeMoss, Scott and Cottrell. During a visit to Washington, D.C., early in 1894, the Standard Quartette became the first black group to make commercial sound recordings, eventually producing at least twenty cylinder records for Columbia Phonograph Company, but not a single one of these cylinders is known to survive in the hands of collectors.



(October 29, 1902)
 The Dinwiddie Quartet
 of Philadelphia—one of
 three surviving discs...



GENUINE NEGROES

They Look, Act, and Sing Like the "Old Times"



WITH a view to giving the general public a true and faithful reproduction of Plantation Life and Scenes before the War, Mr. Polk Miller, of Virginia, who is recognized as the very best delineator of Southern life and character in his Negro sketches, has organized and drilled for the purpose a quartette of the best Negro singers ever heard on the platform. They are taken from the Tobacco Factories of Richmond, Virginia, and, as types of his subject, could not be improved on. Their singing is not of the kind that has been heard by the students from "Colored Universities," who dress in pigeon-tailed coats, patent leather shoes, white shirt fronts, and who are advertised to sing *Plantation Melodies* but do not. They do not try to let you see how nearly a Negro can act the *White Man* while parading in a dark skin, but they dress, act and sing like the real *Southern Darkey* in his "workin'" clothes. As to their voices, they are the *sweet*, though uncultivated, result of nature, producing a *harmony* unequalled by the professionals, and because it is natural, goes straight to the hearts of the people. To the old Southerner it will be "*Sounds from the Old Home of Long Ago*." To others who know of Southern Plantation Life from much reading, it will be a pleasant and *Educational Pastime*. Sandwiched in between these will come the *Dialect Stories and Recitation* of Mr. POLK MILLER and Col. "Tom" BOOKER, which are bits of Folk Lore, giving the characteristics of the *Old Southern Darkey*, which are as true to life as the poems of Riley on the Hoosier of Indiana, and is a combination of the Pathetic and humorous. To hear them is to live again your boyhood days *Down on the Farm*.

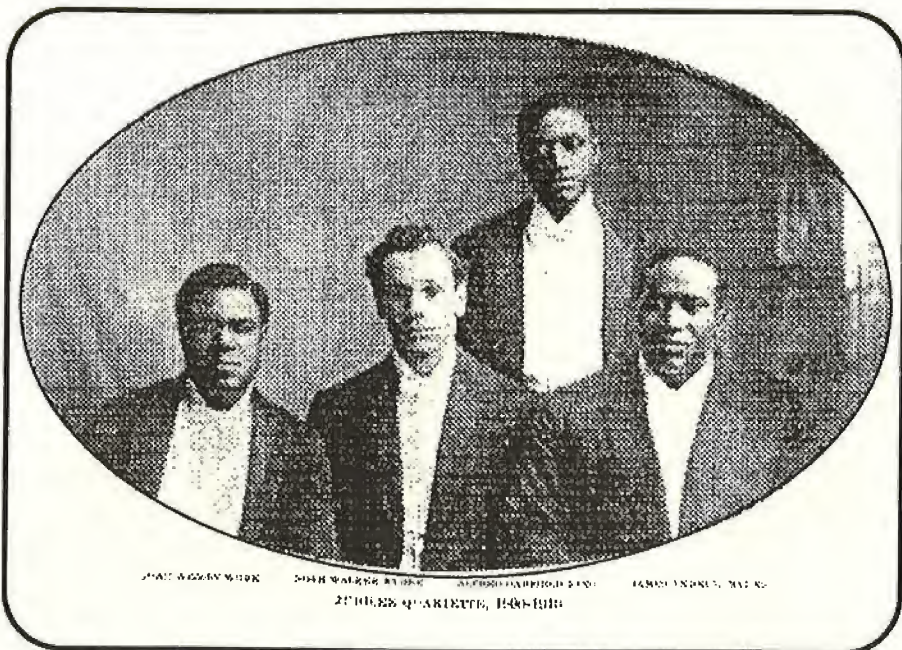
Courtesy: Alexander Freal (Polk Miller Scrapbooks)

OLD SOUTH QUARTETTE, c. 1910
 Page from program brochure (c. 1910)

The Dinwiddie Quartet of Philadelphia (dubbed "Dinwiddie Colored Quartet" by Victor Records) was the next black vocal group to record and the first to be pressed on disc. They were Sterling Rex, first tenor; J. Clarence Meredith, second tenor; Harry B. Cruder, first bass; James Mantell Thomas, second bass. Before the turn-of-the-century, they sang two years in the fund-raising interests of the John A. Dix Industrial School Of Dinwiddie, Virginia (about forty miles south of Richmond). They later went into vaudeville and were touring as featured attractions with Ernest Hogan and Billy McClain's classic production, "The Smart Set," when they recorded six spiritual selections, reportedly at Tenth and Lombard streets in Philadelphia, on October 29, 1902. These six, one-sided 78rpm records are the earliest entries in Dixon & Godrich's *Blues & Gospel Records*. Only three of the six discs are presently known to be in the hands of collectors; Victor 1715, 1716 and 1724 remain unheard.

The third black vocal group to record was the Fisk University Jubilee Quartette, under the direction of the brilliant Prof. John Wesley Work II, first tenor; and featuring James Andrew Myers, second tenor and reader; Alfred Garfield King, first bass; Noah Walker Ryder, second bass. This quartet was first recorded while in the midst of a much celebrated tour of the Northeast, by Victor Records, on December 1, 8, 9 and 12, 1909. Five double-sided discs were issued; these are primarily spiritual titles but include Foster's "Old Black Joe" (performed as a "bass feature") and two Paul L. Dunbar poems, recited by Myers.

It isn't known precisely when Polk Miller and his Old South Quartette recorded their seven excellent selections, but the following details are preserved in the March 1910 issue of *Edison Phonograph Monthly*; "The seven records made by Polk Miller and his 'Old South Quartette,' which went on sale January 3rd, have proven a tremendous surprise. We expected that the demand for these records would be confined almost exclusively to the South... In this we were mistaken, for while naturally the demand was greatest in the South, still the North took to them very kindly and some sections of the West simply cannot get enough of them... The popularity of the records



(courtesy of Fisk University Library, Special Collections)
Fisk University Jubilee Quartette

proves that the real 'darkey' plantation melody still has a firm grip upon the affections of the American public, irrespective of locality. Dealers will do well to advertise and push these records in every way."¹³

I feel certain that all seven Edison cylinders by Polk Miller and his Old South Quartette have survived in the hands of collectors, though I haven't heard "Rise And Shine," (Standard 10332). *Edison Phonograph Monthly* stressed the cylinders' strong sales and four of the titles were reissued on Blue Amberol cylinders.

Pioneer era equipment was less than adequate in recording vocal harmony groups; there were serious difficulties of coping with balance, range of tone and especially variations in volume. The Old South Quartette are much given to loud bursts of volume and even an occasional stridency, accentuated by the inadequacies of recording technology; but these cylinders are exciting listening anyway! The renditions are spirited, irresistibly rousing affairs and Polk Miller's choice of song material is excellent.

The pioneer recordings are especially important, because they capture, reasonably close to the source (the 1890s), music which proliferated for a surprisingly long period of time. These minstrel and jubilee quartet styles were the pre-gospel

singing styles; they took shape during the 1880s and 1890s and retained a dominant influence until 1930. There are any number of 78rpm recordings in these early styles, especially from the 1920s, when the Norfolk Jazz/Jubilee Singers, Birmingham Jubilee Singers and others recorded such songs as "Watermelon Smiling On The Vine," "Raise A Rukus Tonight," and "Who Stole The Lock Off De Hen House Door," along with the newer blues and gospel creations.



...perhaps the only complete version ever waxed of the Southern war song.

The Edison session yielded seven cylinders, four spiritual titles and three secular songs. Several of these recordings are historically "special," "The Bonnie Blue Flag," (Edison Amberole 389), was reported by Jim Walsh to be "perhaps the only complete version ever waxed of the Southern war song."¹⁴ Miller sings a powerful, heartfelt rendition of the Confederate anthem, on this four-minute cylinder. History and rendering conspire to lend an uncanny quality to this recording, which is enhanced by the presence of the black quartet.

"Laughing Song" (Edison Amberole 390), is a generic "laughing song," meaning, it features a "laughing chorus," in this case sung by the leader, while the quartet harmonizes behind. Laughing songs were popular with both races, way back into the nineteenth century, but I know of only one other recording by a black quartet (don't be fooled by their name), the wonderful Seven Musical Magpies of Cleveland, Ohio, who recorded a "Laughing Song" for Victor in 1924 (Victor 19544).

Mark Twain called "The Watermelon Party" (Ed. Amberole 392), "a musical earthquake."¹⁵ It is a roaring plantation melody; the lyrics are a litany of black country foodstuff. According to *The New Phonogram*, this song was written by Old South Quartette basser James Stamper. When the Old South Quartette recorded again, eighteen years later, "The Watermelon Party" and "Laughing Song" (retitled "Oysters And Wine At 2 A.M.," but otherwise identical), were part of that QRS recording session.

The New Phonogram wrote of "Jerusalem Mornin'" (Standard 10334): "A camp-meeting song and probably the catchiest of the seven numbers."¹⁶ The group gives a strong, tight performance of this a cappella spiritual, rendered in a popular, minstrel-bastardized version, which contains the classic couplet:

"The Good Books says that Cain Killed Abel,

He knocked him in the head with the leg of a table."¹⁷

There is also excellent harmony on the other a cappella song "The Old Time Religion," about which *The New Phonogram* says, "a hymn



(courtesy of Mrs. Mildred Cisco)

THE MUSICAL MAGPIES of Cleveland, Ohio, c. 1920

BACK ROW (L to R): Sherman Copeland; Harry Ford; Tom Davis.

SEATED (l to R): Joseph Cisco; George Early.

of Negro origin, so melodious that Southern whites have introduced it into their church service."¹⁸

"We are exceedingly anxious to have you, but our people don't want the quartette..."

Particularly when he traveled with the Old South Quartette, Polk Miller was like a racial lightning rod in a violent storm. Not long after the Edison recording session, Polk Miller and his quartet came tumbling down. A front page story appeared in the *Richmond Journal*, January 3, 1912, headlined: "Abandons Show Biz - Polk Miller's Famous Negro Quartette Is No More." Miller explained to the *Journal* reporter: "Some of the Northern towns which wanted me would write, 'We are exceedingly anxious to have you, but our people don't want the quartette, as our people do not like the Negro.' There is a certain class of whites in the South, whose ancestors never owned Negroes... This class of people made it very uncomfortable for my Negroes. My solicitude for the comfort of my men, and many times for the safety of them in going from the halls to their quarters, wor-

ried me very much, and unfitted me for my work... this fact, with the in-born dislike of the Negro on the part of the hoodlum element, intensified my troubles when on the road and in some places I had to call on the police force to guard my men..."

"The better class of white people knew that I used these Negroes for a purpose—to illustrate my work...but the commoner classes could not understand why Polk Miller, who posed as a gentleman, could bring a lot of 'niggers' there to entertain white people..."

"Did you have the same men with you all the time?"

"By no means," said Mr. Miller, "I made frequent changes during the time. I never discharged one of them for a fault, but they had to give up for other reasons. One of my best men was paralyzed four years ago and he is my porter in the drug store now... Others had throat troubles and had to give up...."

"I have had about twenty men in all, I reckon, since I first began to use a Negro quartette... For local purposes (entertaining here at home) I will perhaps organize a good one, but I shall never again take a Negro quartette on the road with me."¹⁹

On the following day (January 4),

Hear the Old South Quartette



Sing
7025 No Hiding Place Down Here
Oh What He's Done for Me

(courtesy of MIKE MONTGOMERY)

The Old South Quartette appear in this newly discovered QRS flyer
...15 years after the death of Polk Miller!

a *Richmond Journal* editorial sympathized: "Mr. Miller, always the personification of amiability...touches the subject so politely that the casual reader would hardly grasp in full the fact that he has been compelled to give up his Negro quartette because of the rank prejudice against the Negro...."

"He (Miller) is deeply grieved over the necessity of givin' up his quartette, and a cherished purpose, which, because of prejudice against the Negro race, has defeated its own ends..."²⁰

Polk Miller died on October 20,

1913, at the age of sixty-nine. He is buried in Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond.

Finally there is Polk Miller's commentary explaining how he disposed of the quartet, which points the way to New York: "I farmed them out to a New York man for five weeks. He was so much taken with them that he has taken them for good and all, for which I am profoundly grateful."²¹

At this point, sadly, we utterly loose track of the Old South Quartette. Answers may lie in the unex-

amined pages of the *New York Age* and *Amsterdam News*.

The Old South Quartette appear again, as if they were transported by time machine, into the QRS recording studio, Long Island City, New York, in the autumn of 1928. Fifteen years after the death of Polk Miller, the Old South Quartette recorded some of the same songs, in the very same style they had sung them in two decades earlier.

Under Polk Miller's direction, the Old South Quartette was, from its formation, an essentially "backward-looking" musical aggregation; designed to evoke fond memories of

an earlier era; they were never exactly in the forefront of new directions in music. If the 1910 recordings seem close to the source of original inspiration, one would think that by 1928 these nineteenth century methods would be sounding profoundly dated, but that is not the case; the classic styles were extremely tenacious.

The QRS recordings include five secular titles and two religious ones. Guitar accompaniment is provided by a member of the quartet. It seems almost incredible to me that none of these have ever been reissued; some of the secular songs are very special, in certain respects unique 78 rpm recordings.

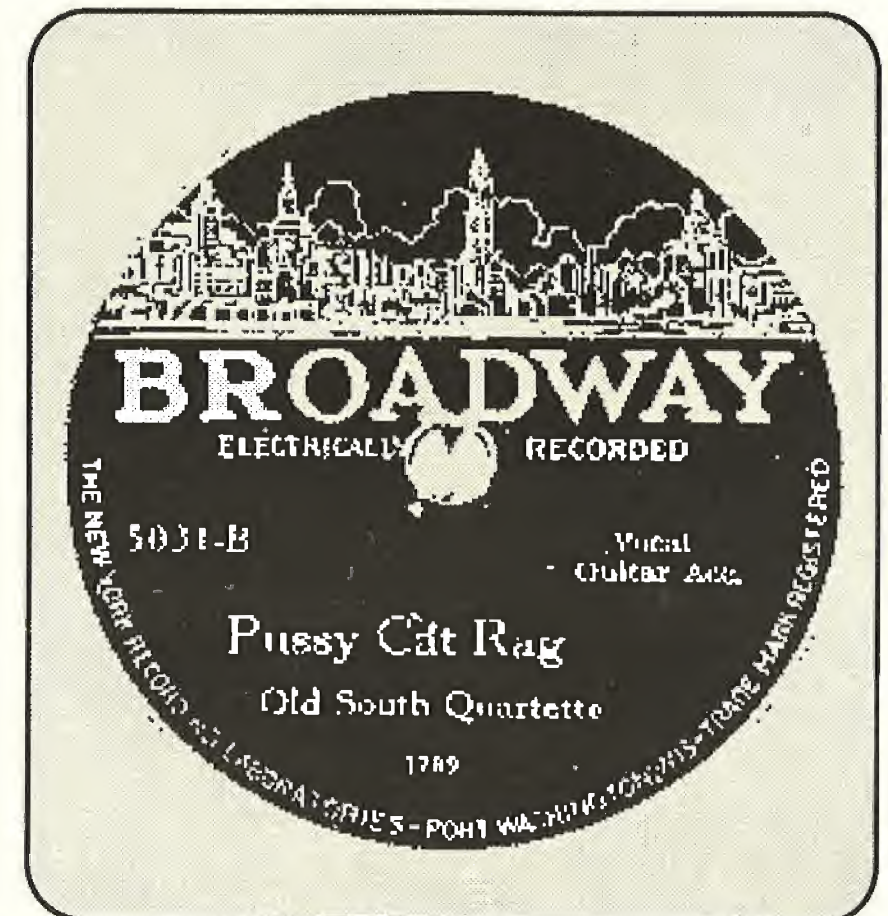
One favorite is "When De Corn Pone's Hot," (QRS R7029), a musical arrangement of a Paul Laurence Dunbar dialect poem, full of the most gorgeous folk imagery. I know of no other recording of this title. No doubt, the lyrics carry the song, while the group's articulation (clear pronunciation) is always excellent. They give their characteristic, enthusiastic, simple, old-fashioned harmony treatment. The Old South Quartette were not the harmony hounds their Birmingham contemporaries were. For instance, the Old South Quartette almost always preferred to let the leader sing the verses solo, with guitar accompaniment; the quartet chimes in, in four-part harmony, at the chorus. This quartette sang "loose," as opposed to "close" harmony and they weren't overly concerned about smoothing out rough edges. Like the Coasters in the late 1950s, the Old South relied on the strength of their song material, and it certainly was strong.

"Pussy Cat Rag" (QRS R7006), seems a strikingly prurient ditty, though it might require an expert in historical scatology to determine precisely how lewdly suggestive this song was intended to be. The melody is simple and pleasant, the chorus is catchy. Lyrics describe the singer's old maid sister, who is "crazy over cats." At intervals, there is "dog barking," and a vaguely obscene chorus of "meows," as the leader cajoles, "Come on pussss, come on pussss; just a little bit, that's enough of it!" Guaranteed to get your attention.

The Old South Quartette showed excellent judgment in re-recording

two titles from their pioneer era session. "Oysters And Wine At 2 A.M.," the 1928 version of the song recorded earlier as "Laughing Song," may be the single most perfect example of minstrel quartet on wax. The 1910 version has considerable charm of its own, but the audio quality of the QRS 78 is infinitely superior to the Edison cylinder and the musical rendition is every bit as strong. I

words and phrases are meaningless and loosely strung together does not detract from the attractiveness of the song...the fact that the words are truly characteristic of the darkey as he is rather enhances the attractiveness of the record." Racist condescension aside, "Oysters And Wine At 2 A.M." is a marvelous piece of "naive" songwriting (in part):



(from the collection of Doug Seroff)

...a strikingly prurient ditty, though it might require an expert in historical scatology...

find it extraordinary that the group could have changed their song arrangement so little over so long a period of time, and surely some personnel changes must have occurred.

The composition "Oysters And Wine At 2 A.M." (QRS R7006) merits closer inspection. Says *The New Phonogram*, "This song, written by genuine Southern plantation darkeys with little or no education, contains phrases and expressions which are coined and introduced haphazardly... The fact that the

"A journey to Long Branch is pleasant and always delightful to me, While strolling the beach at moonlight, while the wild waves are rolling the sea; Then give me a lady for waltzing, such pleasures to me they are grand, And quickly passed by it is finished, we have oysters and wine at two. (Chorus) Oysters and wine at 2 A.M., 2 A.M., 2 A.M., We have oysters and wine at 2 A.M., We have oysters and wine at two."²²

once had in my possession, what I believe is the only known copy of Broadway 5031, by the Old South Quartette, "Pussy Cat Rag" (same take as QRS R7006), coupled with an *unknown title*, mislabeled "Oysters And Wine At 2 A. M." The legitimate song title cannot be established with any certainty; the recording does not appear on any known QRS issue. The song is performed in a responsory, mock-"lined" style of plantation hokum, to a melody suggestive of "Auld Lang Syne." The untitled song is fundamentally similar to one recorded in 1927 by the Birmingham Jubilee Singers, titled "Bohunkus And Josephus" (Columbia 14370-D), but the names of the "two brothers" are changed to Tobias and "Keechungus" (?). The two versions are quite different in some ways and they make an interesting comparison. They share only one verse in common, about a farmer who had two sons, "and these two boys were brothers." This is a song that may have had many verses, it seems a vehicle for improvisational song writing and minstrel humor.

The Birmingham Jubilees sing; "For these two boys, he bought two suits, for them to wear on Sunday; Bohunkus wore his everyday, Josephus wore his Monday." The Old South Quartette add: "Now these two boys, they had a cow, and that old cow was blind. She had a pair of legs in front, and another pair behind."

The recorded repertoire of the Old South Quartette makes a strong statement about the process of anonymous song composition in nineteenth century black secular "folk" music; the religious counterpart, of course, would be the spirituals. The spiritual song tradition was exhaustively documented and collected during the years between the Civil War and the Great Depression, but not so the secular traditions. Until about World War I, it was generally perceived by scholars and at least the Northern public, that "Negro Folk Music is wholly religious."²⁴ Ragtime, with its racist "coon song" lyrics, hardly entered into the equation. Yet ragtime and minstrelsy were both derived from earlier black secular folk traditions and practices.

Songs like "Oysters And Wine At 2 A. M.," and "Tobias And Keechun-

gus," as sung by avowed preservationists Polk Miller and his Old South Quartette, are a glimpse into what may be a lost songwriting tradition. The composers of these anonymous hokum fantasies expressed their freedom from all constraints of imagination and copyright. Even in the few pioneer era quartet recordings that are available, there are examples of grafted phrases, whole verses, partial melodies, whatever; taken from earlier songs. This is an underlying process that has always been at the essence of black quartet creativity, a form of "cumulative" composition and song arrangement, in the public domain.

The preservationist tendencies of Polk Miller and his Old South Quartette allow us to look back through them, to even earlier eras and music styles. The scrapbooks, recordings and newspaper clippings that have survived are singularly fine documentation, that can be an effective key to deeper understanding of black musical traditions; in order to receive the message, we must peer through the veil of turn-of-the-century American racism and Polk Miller's own peculiar perceptions. The screaming ironies attached to this bit of history, somehow help clear away the cobwebs from forgotten glories of nineteenth century black music. Regard that as Polk Miller's legacy. □

DISCOGRAPHY

POLK MILLER and his OLD SOUTH QUARTETTE

Male vcl grp, including Randall Graves, first tenor; James L. Stamper, bass; unknown second tenor; unknown baritone; Polk Miller, first tenor-1; accomp. Polk Miller, banjo-2; unknown group member, guitar-3; unaccompanied-4. Unknown location. c. December, 1909. (4-MINUTE CYLINDERS):

The Bonnie Blue Flag-1,2—Ed Amberole 389, Blue Amberol EBA 2175

Laughing Song-2,3—Ed Amberole 390; Blue Amberol EBA 2176

What A Time-2,3—Ed Amberole 391; Blue Amberol EBA 2177

The Watermelon Party-2,3—Ed Amberole 392, Blue Amber EBA 2178

AS ABOVE: c. December 1909 (2-MINUTE CYLINDERS):

Rise And Shine-1—Standard 10332

The Old Time Religion-1,4—Standard 10333

Jerusalem Mornin'-1,4—Standard 10334

*Accompaniment on "Rise And Shine" is not known.

OLD SOUTH QUARTETTE

Male vcl quartet, personnel unknown; unknown group member, guitar; and mandolin-1

Long Island City, N.Y.C.c. August 1928

157-A Oh What He's Done For Me-1—QRS R7025

159- Watermelon Party—QRS R7029

162-A unknown title—Broadway 5031

164-A Pussy Cat Rag—QRS R7006, Broadway 5031

166-A When De Corn Pone's Hot—QRS R7029

168- No Hiding Place Down Here—QRS R7025

Oyster's And Wine At 2 A.M.—QRS R7006

*This tune is mislabeled "Oysters And Wine At 2 A.M." on Broadway 5031, but is, in fact, a different song, which begins: "Old Father Grimes, a good old soul, will never be anymore..." sung to a tune derived from "Auld Lang Syne."

THE STANDARD QUARTETTE

Male vocal quartet, including H. C. Williams, Ed DeMoss, R. L. Scott, William Cottrell; unaccompanied. Washington, D.C. c.early 1894

Annie Laurie—Columbia (cylinder) 2236

Old Aunt Jemima—2237

Way Down Yonder In The Cornfield—2238

The Old Oaken Bucket—2039

Almost Persuaded—2240

Little Alabama Coon—2241

Genevieve Medley—2242

When The Mists Have Rolled Away—2243

Nationality Medley—2244

Widdy-Wink—2245

You May Talk About Jerusalem Morning—2246

Rocked In The Cradle Of The Deep—2247

Old Kentucky Home—2248

Nationality Medley—9002

Widdy-Wink—9003

Swing Low Sweet Chariot—Columbia (cylinder) ??

Steal Away To Jesus—??

Keep Movin'—??

Poor Mourner—??

Who Broke The Lock On The Henhouse Door?—??

Tapioca Medley—??

Say Bo, Give Me Them Two Bits—??

FISK UNIVERSITY JUBILEE QUARTET

Prof. John Wesley Work, first tenor; Rev. James Andrew Myers, second tenor; Alfred Garfield King, first bass; Noah Walker Ryder, second bass; unaccompanied. REV. J. A. MYERS, reader, unaccompanied.

Camden, New Jersey. 1 December 1909

B 8420 Swing Low Sweet Chariot—VI unissued

C 8421 My Old Kentucky Home—VI unissued

B 8422 I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray—VI unissued

Camden, New Jersey..8 December 1909.

B 8420-2 Swing Low Sweet Chariot—VI 16543

B 8420-3 Swing Low Sweet Chariot—VI unissued

C 8421-2 My Old Kentucky Home—VI unissued

B 8422-2 I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray—VI 16448

B 8450 1. Little David, Play On Yo' Harp—2. Shout All Over God's Heaven—VI 16448

Camden, New Jersey. 9 December 1909.

B 8451 There Is A Balm In Gilead—VI 16487

B 8451 Roll Jordan Roll—VI unissued

B 8453 Negro Lullaby—VI unissued

C 8454 Old Black Joe—VI 35097

B 8455 Golden Slippers—VI unissued

C 8456 When Malindy Sings—VI 35097

B 8457 Banjo Song—VI 16466

VI 35097 is a 12" 78 rpm disc. When Malindy Sings and Banjo Song are Dunbar recitations, credited as REV. J. A. MYERS.

Camden, New Jersey. 12 December 1909

B 8452-2 Roll Jordan Roll—VI 16466

B 8455-2 Golden Slippers—VI 16453

B 8455-3 Golden Slippers—VI unissued

B 8500 The Great Campmeeting—VI 16487

B 8500-2 The Great Campmeeting—VI unissued

Camden, New Jersey. 6 February 1911

B 9920 1. The Ole Ark—2. Brethren Rise, Shine—VI 16840

B 9921 1. Good News—2. Wasn't That A Wide River—VI 16856

B 9922 Done What You Tole Me To Do—VI 16895

B 9923 Po' Mo'ner Got A Home At Last—VI unissued

B 9924 In Bright Mansions Above—VI 16856

Camden, New Jersey. 7 February 1911

B 9925 My Soul Is A Witness—VI 16864

B 9926 Band Of Gideon—VI 16864

B 9927 I Know The Lord Laid His Hands On Me—VI 16895

Camden, New Jersey. 10 February 1911

B 9923-2 Po' Mo'ner Got A Home At Last—VI 16843

B 9923-3 Po' Mo'ner Got A Home At Last—VI unissued

—In The Morning—VI 16840

B 9928-2 The Old Tunes—VI 16843

In The Morning; The Old Tunes are Dunbar recitations, credited to J. A. MYERS.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance and freely shared research: Ray Funk was instrumental in helping to locate Polk Miller's scrapbooks. Lynn Abbott is responsible for many of the photographic reproductions from the scrapbooks, and his time consuming, insightful work reviewing black newspapers on microfilm, yielded some of the most crucial commentaries drawn upon here. Kip Lornell generously shared photographs from his personal collection. Ferdie Gonzalez was helpful in pursuing discographical leads. I would also like to thank Tim Brooks, Mike Montgomery, Charles Wolfe, Blue Ridge Institute, Country Music Foundation Library and Fisk University Library Special Collections, for assistance and encouragement.

A special debt of gratitude is due Alexander Neal.

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FOOTNOTES

1. "Polk Miller, 'Banjo Player,'" Unidentified Richmond newspaper, c. August, 1892.

2. "Twain And Polk Miller," *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, c. October, 15, 1894.

3. "Polk Miller And Negro Prejudice," *Richmond Journal*, January 4, 1912.

4. *Richmond Times*, September 24, 1927. This is from a retrospective article on Polk Miller.

5. Robert B. Winans, "The Folk, The Stage, and the Five-String Banjo In The Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 89, No.354, October-December 1976.

6. Peter Pardee, "Fred Sokolow," *Banjo Newsletter*, March, 1985. Reproduced in James Everett unpublished dissertation, University of California.

7. James Everett unpublished dissertation, University of California, p. 56.

8. "Abandons Show Biz," *Richmond Journal*, January 3, 1912.

9. *Ibid*.

10. Unknown Richmond Newspaper article, 1935. This article is a retrospective on Polk Miller. A portion of this quote also appears in *The New Phonogram*, March, 1910. The original printed source is not known.

11. "Abandons Show Biz," *op. cit*.

12. *Richmond Planet*, March 5, 1910.

13. "Polk Miller Records A Surprise," *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, March 1910. Reproduced in George Black, "Disco-ing In," *Record Research* Summer 1986.

14. Jim Walsh, "Polk Miller And His Old South Quartet," *Hobbies*, January 1960.

15. Unknown Richmond newspaper article, 1935, *op. cit*.

16. *The New Phonogram*, March, 1910, *op. cit*.

17. Another excellent version of "Jerusalem Mornin'" was recorded by the Sunset Four in 1923 (Paramount 12221). It features the spectacular bass singing of minstrel quartet luminary Hosey Crawford.

18. *The New Phonogram*, March 1910, *op. cit*.

19. "Abandons Show Biz," *op. cit*.

20. "Polk Miller And Negro Prejudice," *op. cit*.

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22. *The New Phonogram*, June 1911. Reprinted in *Hobbies*, *op. cit*.

23. A complete transcription of the lyrics of this song appeared in *The New Phonogram*, *Ibid*.

24. John Wesley Work II, *Folk Song of the American Negro*, Fisk University Press, 1915, p. 27.



(photo courtesy DICK SPOTTSWOOD)

Gabino Ezeiza (1858–1916),
a pioneer tango composer
and performer.

gence, not much money and a lot of luck, I had managed to put together a respectable assortment of ancient jazz, blues and country shellacs at that point. I never really got my share of black-label Champions (we all know where *they* went), but there were enough Paramounts, Victor 23000s and Electrobeams lying around that I felt it hadn't all been for nought. But, by the 1970's, it seemed that most of the ground-work had been laid, the important discographies compiled (excepting country, of course), the best stuff re-issued and the definitive critiques and histories written. Good 78s were (and are) still inexpensive in comparison with their content, scarcity, and in relation to what a comparable postage stamp, oil painting or first edition would cost in their respective circles. Even so, those good 78s were becoming less available and those who were inclined to dispose of them were commanding prices beyond my means and I began to collect rare items much less competitively.

In 1974, the Library of Congress hired me to produce a fifteen-record folk music set for the Bicentennial in 1976. When I took the job, I decided that I wanted somehow to get at the music on the many special foreign series on Columbia, Victor, Brunswick, etc., and at some of the independent label products which were made especially for immigrant audiences. I had no idea what any of it would sound like but I remembered a couple of articles that Pekka Gronow had written,¹ sounding a clarion call for American collectors to pay attention to these records and learn to cherish the best amongst them.

Pekka made sense and he followed a long line of European scholars — Panassie, Delaunay, Rust and others — who were instrumental in pointing out the worth of jazz to Americans in the last generation. After all, jazz, blues and coun-

“quarterly” meant four times a century! Be that as it may, my pleasure was enhanced when I was asked to place a contribution to 78's bulk, chatting up old ethnic discs.

I guess this activity, born around ten years ago, solved one sort of mid-life crisis. With a shred of intelli-

COLLECTING ETHNIC

by Dick Spottswood

Well, it was quite a pleasure to get a phone call from our editor one night last fall, advising me that 78 Quarterly was recommencing publication after an unfortunate twenty-five year hiatus. After all, most of us hadn't thought that



This surviving Gabino Ezeiza recording was made
in 1906–7, most likely in Buenos Aires...

try were also products of American minority groups, usually to their economic detriment, and it stood to reason that, if King Oliver, Uncle Dave Macon and Ma Rainey had something special to offer the world from their unique perspectives, then other minorities probably produced artists of comparable worth and integrity.

I quickly discovered that the 1920s formed the same focal point for ethnic music as it does for jazz, et al., being the period when record companies were simply seeking out the music as it existed, creating a product to suit its audiences' needs rather than (as happens these days) creating artificial music for the widest possible audience. It was still possible in the twenties to hear rural and village music from the old world played by recent immigrants who kept it more or less intact — and a lot of it shows up on Victor scrolls and Columbia Viva-Tonals. What to make of them can be something else again. Title and artist credits, performance description and even the message that says “always use _____ needles” are often hidden behind formidable language barriers and unfamiliar alphabets. Some companies used different color paper to print ethnic labels: Columbia

went to green, Okeh to bright orange, Emerson and Brunswick to purple; good old Victor gave no such clues. If it was classical it was Red Seal; if it wasn't, it was black. Lots of special number series were devised to sort out separate nationalities. There were a lot of ethnic records made and my initial encounters with them involved deciphering what was what, as well as sorting wheat from chaff.

I also discovered that a lot of this new music was as good as it was different. Like German expressionist art or Beckett's plays, the best of it isn't immediately accessible but its innate qualities are guaranteed to reward the adventurous, careful listener. There are East European fiddle bands with enough gutsy energy to rival the Skillet Lickers or the Buckle Busters. The best Irish fiddlers play with a skill which would make an Itzhak Perlman stop and take notice. There's music from the Balkan and Near East countries — Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Bulgaria, Albania —



A 1924 reissue of a 1922
Black Swan by Trinidad pianist
Lionel Belasco, who began an
extensive recording career
with Victor in 1914...

with haunting modal tonalities which suggest both the blues and the “high, lonesome” sound of Bill Monroe and Ralph Stanley.

Of special interest is the wealth of Afro-American music from the other Americas. The United States

didn't get around to recording indigenous black music until the twenties; the wealth of music we could have saved from earlier decades has disappeared except for old photos and historic accounts. So it's all the more surprising that early field trips to Central and South America by Columbia, Edison and Victor regularly produced records of Black music from Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and other locales. In Argentina, the *milonga* is a song form which was a precursor to the *tango*. *Milonga* singers were frequently Black and, amongst them, pioneers like Higinio Cazón, Gabino Ezeiza and Arturo De Nava are represented on records made between 1905-10. Edison was in Cuba making two-minute cylinders early in 1906; Victor spent eleven days in Havana in March 1907. Both recorded the local municipal military ensembles and then turned to dance groups led by Pablo Valenzuela, Enrique Peña and Felipe Valdés. They recorded urban *boleros* and *rumbas* and the rural-based *puntos guajiros* by singers like Aldofo Colombo, Martín Silveira and Antonio Morejón.

Columbia undoubtedly followed parallel routes during these important years but the remaining files at CBS give only sketchy ideas of where and when their records were made. A surviving Gabino Ezeiza record (Columbia 55098, "Cosmopolismo") is a pre-1908 black and silver label single-side disc with no indication of its origin, though the unusually high number suggests a remote origin. The company seems to have made it to Puerto Rico by 1910 where they recorded, among other things, *danzas* by Manuel Tizol's orchestra. His son Juan (1900-1984), who went on to fame with Duke Ellington, played with his father's band and may even be present on Manuel's early records.

Edison recording teams went to Mexico City in 1904...

Edison's most frequently visited location was Mexico City; recording teams were there in 1904, 1907 and 1909. The revolution broke out in 1910 and, afterwards, Edison confined his Spanish-language records to performers either visiting or residing in New York. Victor, whose



1910s activities are best documented, found its way to Trinidad, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Puerto Rico and Cuba, preserving exciting local music wherever the engineers stopped. We can only imagine what we'd have today if recording teams had visited Birmingham, St. Louis, New Orleans, San Antonio and Chicago too.

Moreover, European firms also sent crews to remote locales to make records early in the century. England's Gramophone & Type-writer Company (later HMV) paid visits to Cairo, Constantinople (Istanbul), Calcutta, Tiflis, Sofia, Belgrade, Burma, Tibet, Tunis and Algiers in addition to tours of western European cities. Few of the results seem to survive on original pressings but enough was repressed by Victor here to show that the music they captured could be exciting indeed, and quite authentic.

Much of the excitement in pursuing early ethnic 78s - and the occasional cylinder - for me is the repeated discoveries I've made of music firmly grounded in tradition, preserved in those years before jet-setting and the mass media had a chance to (for better or worse) bring our world closer together. It isn't hard to imagine that some of these records might have been made decades or even centuries earlier without significant differences in the music. Just as folk music scholars paid little attention to early blues and hillbilly records until this generation, music historians and eth-

An early 20's disc by singer/fiddler V. Margosian, who recorded for his own and several other small Armenian-language labels in New York City...

nomusicologists remain largely unaware of this potentially mighty resource today.

I'd enjoy hearing from any reader who might share my peculiar passion. Even more, I'd like to hear from anyone who doesn't - and wouldn't mind sending some good discs my way!

Dick Spottswood
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University Park, MD 20782
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¹ "Finnish-American Records," *JEMF Quarterly* 7, no. 24 (Winter 1971): pp. 176-185, and "A Preliminary Checklist of Foreign-Language 78s," *JEMF Quarterly* 9, no. 29 (Spring 1973): pp. 24-32.

Dick Spottswood has prepared a discography, *Ethnic Music on Records*, which will be published by the University of Illinois Press.



The Delta—c. 1930

"BIG FOOT" WILLIAM HARRIS

By Gayle Dean Wardlow



(photo courtesy Gayle Dean Wardlow)

(above) The late Hayes McMullen first saw William Harris dancing with a woman and playing guitar at the same time.

Despite Charley Patton's apparent influence and seemingly endless number of musical relations, a radically different approach to blues-playing was taken by a Tallahatchie County bluesman named William Harris, who is believed to have been raised on Mike

Sterdivant's 4,000 acre *Due West* plantation near Glendora, Mississippi. To Hayes McMullen, Harris stood out as the "king" of his musical peers, dwarfing both Patton and "Little Willie" Brown with his talents. Today his recordings, which numbered fourteen sides (nine of which survive), form the only significant



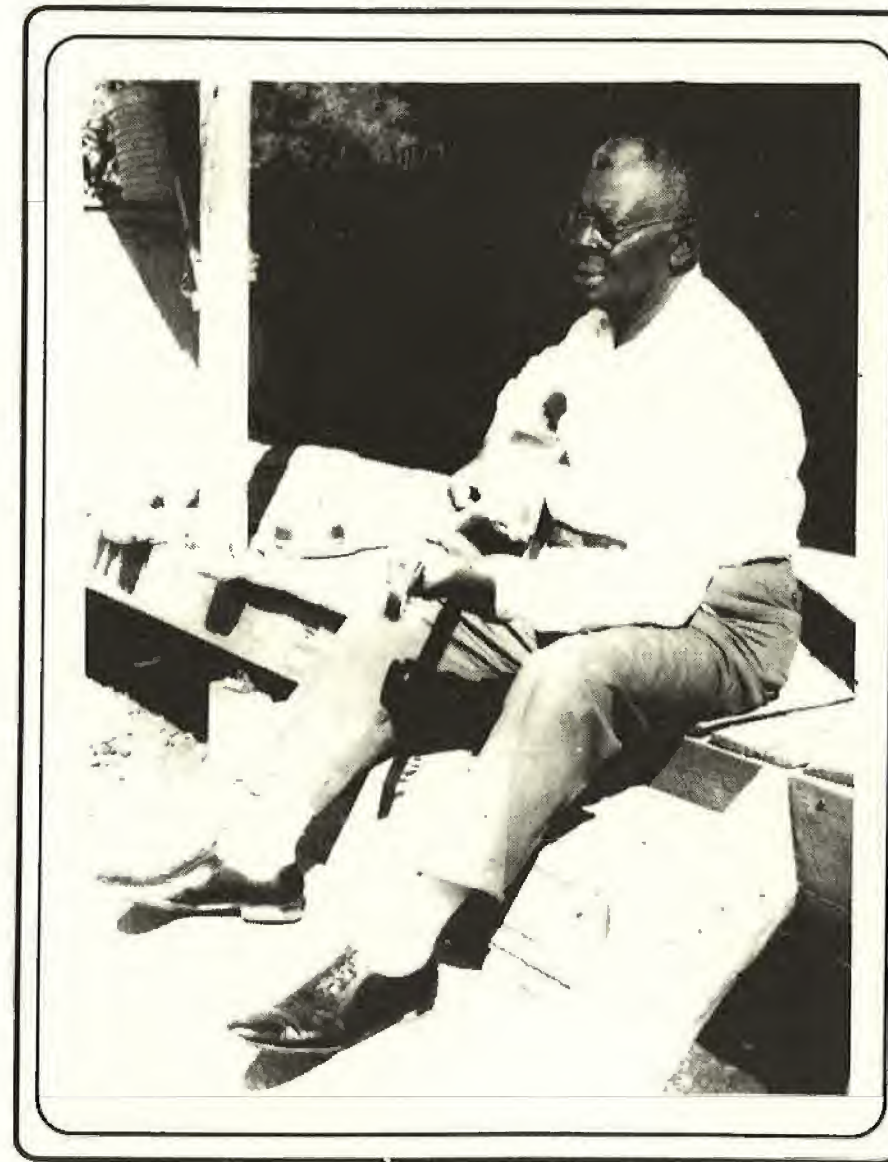
body of Delta music besides Patton's to be handed down from the Twenties.

Listening to Harris' maiden effort, *I'm Leavin' Town*, Booker Miller, a Patton protégé from 1930-1934 who was to give up blues for the ministry, would comment: "That's pure Delta there." He found its musical ingredients common to guitar-playing he once heard "round Greenwood, Belzoni, Moorhead, all up and down the line," and likened Harris' sound to that of a Clarksdale musician named James Binnel. Another Delta listener, Mandy Whigham of Moorhead, says of the same record: "His voice and his music all sound like the Delta to me—he is a Delta man." To this listener Harris' singing and playing were evocative of a Rul-ville guitarist named Logan Rome.

If Harris the musician could claim a collective identity, Harris the individual left few traces for blues researchers of later decades. Sources on *Due West* (which counted some three hundred sharecropper families in the Twenties) said that Harris often played in Glendora and nearby Swan Lake, usually in the company of another plantation tenant, Bo Weavil Jackson. It was Jackson who played the first version of the Delta standard, *Shake 'em On Down*, that Booker Miller ever heard; though not the same man as the recording artist by that name, he was a better-known musical figure

in the Delta than Harris himself. A Tchula-born mandolinist named Henry Austin who was then living near Itta Bena also accompanied Harris at a Swan Lake jukehouse in the late Twenties, and recalls Charley Patton's occasional presence there: "He'd come over here and play with us."

Harris left a graphic impression on Hayes McMullen of Tippecanoe, who met him in the spring of 1927. Entering a house party on *Wildwood*, a plantation near the town of Webb, McMullen saw a very dark, skinny figure



(photo courtesy Gayle Dean Wardlow)

Hayes McMullen: "I never saw William Harris take a drink in my life."

dressed in a suit and a Stetson hat who was dancing with a woman and playing guitar at the same time. "Oh, he was funny," McMullen says. "He was jokin' the folks 'round there pretty good..."

"The folks got to jokin' about he had big feet..."

McMullen came to know the man as "Big Foot William Harris," or simply as "Foot" (names produced, Henry Austin explains, when "the folks got to jokin' about he had big feet" at a Swan Lake gathering). Over the next four years, he made it a point to catch Harris at work in Webb, which lies about five miles north of Swan Lake. He made no attempt to accompany or learn Harris' songs, but during intermissions would slyly proffer his own music, a practice he thinks aroused Harris' "jealousy." Perhaps for this reason he had minimal discourse with Harris, whom he took to be a man slightly older than himself (McMullen was twenty-five when he first saw him.) Harris impressed him not only for displaying a brand of musicianship he never heard elsewhere, but for a degree of sobriety that was practically unknown to Delta bluesmen: "I never saw William Harris take a drink in my life," he says.

Although McMullen thought Harris was cropping on *Wildwood*, his lack of fixed roots during the late Twenties discloses a professional blues career. When Henry Austin last saw him, Harris was bound for the hill country town of Grenada, which lies southeast of Tallahatchie County. There he gave Saturday afternoon street performances (sometimes with an accompanist) as early as 1928. A resident of Holcomb, a small town a few miles west of Grenada, thought he could place Harris on the basis of his recordings: "...That's the same guy that Albert Washington used to get to come here...He'd come here and make music; come here two-three different times...Some more would come with him...Charleston, I think; that's where Albert would bring him from." The occasions for these appearances were church benefit dances held in a local schoolhouse.

Harris is also said to have joined a carnival during the late Twenties. His discovery came in the small



One known copy...



Two known copies...



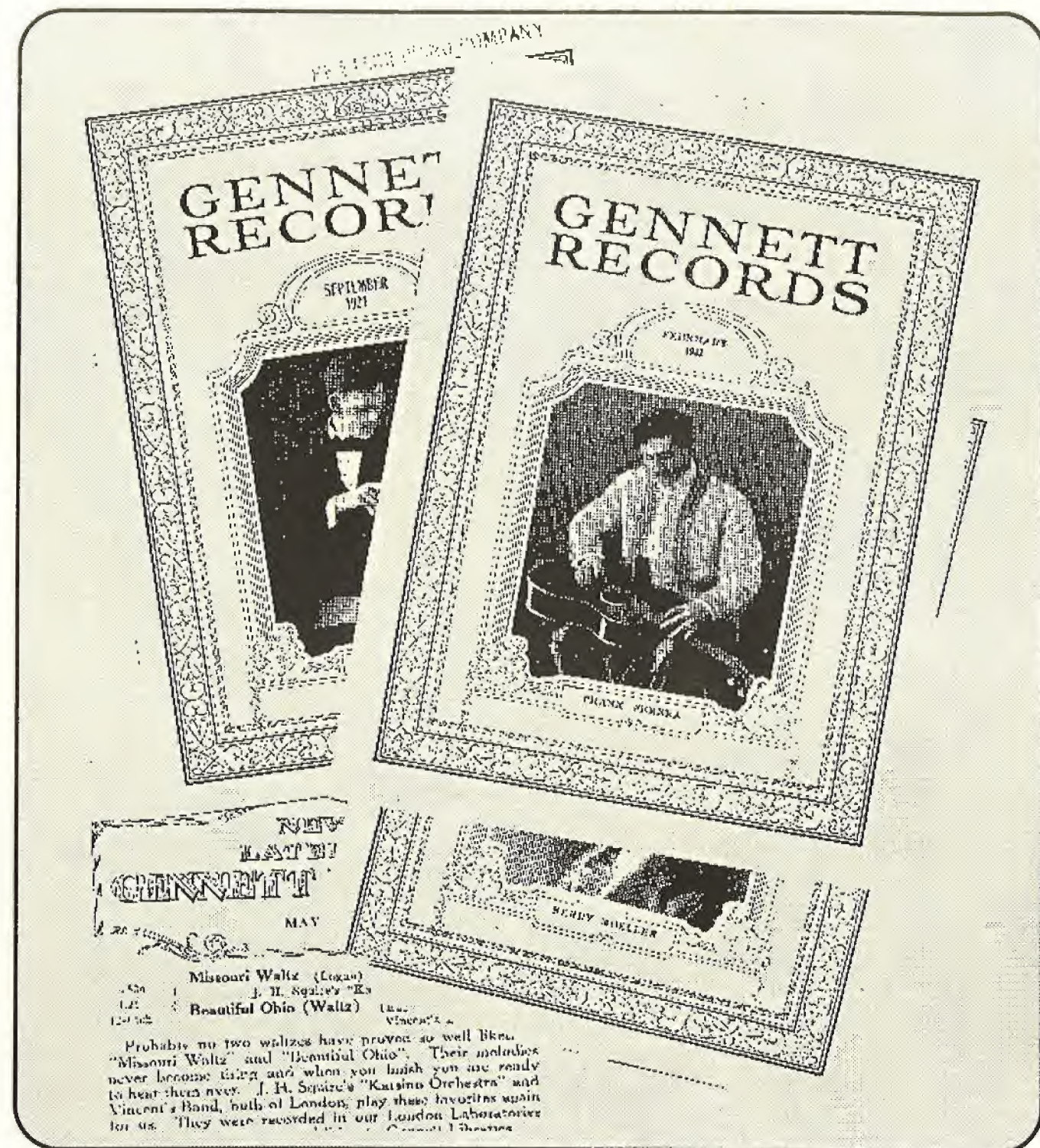
One known copy...

H.C. Speir: "wouldn't sell much... the guitar's all right, but the words..."

town of Carpenter near Port Gibson by H.C. Speir in 1927. Speir happened onto Harris as he was playing church music at a Sunday picnic, and ticketed him to Gennett Records. He was one of the first Mississippi blues discoveries, and possibly the earliest Delta artist to reach a recording studio. Another Mississippi artist, R.D. Norwood from Jackson, was on the same session.

The two sessions Harris garnished produce an uneven impression of his instrumental abilities (he is a consistently strong vocalist), but establish his grip of three different guitar keys and an even wider range of guitar styles. His strongest works are in the key of D: *Bull Frog Blues* and *I'm Leavin' Town*, both designed (Hayes McMullen says) for Shimmy dancing. They contrast a raucous, non-stop instrumental percussion with a staggered style of vocal phrasing that rankled H.C. Speir, who said of the former title: "That wouldn't sell much. There's too much runnin' together...The guitar's all right, but the words...they got to have words that swing, like a wave. It's like puttin' shingles on a house."

Speir's hindsight proved better than his foresight, for Harris was a dismal commercial flop, and dropped from sight soon afterwards. When McMullen moved to Webb in 1931 he had already left the area. A Swan Lake report that he moved to New Orleans around 1932 and died in Louisiana or southern Mississippi is inconclusive, but his recordings remain to commend Booker Miller's assertion: "We didn't have too many 'sorry' musicians, when the blues were popular." □



GENNETT—CHAMPION BLUES

Richmond, Indiana: (1923—1934)—Part One
by Tom Tsotsi

"In the beginning... the acoustical period..."

It all started, we read, with Mamie Smith's Okeh 4169 "Crazy Blues"/"It's Right Here For You," both sides described on the label as "Popular Blue Song;" the time was November 1920. From the sales of this record, it became apparent to the record companies that there was a heretofore untapped market beckoning to them—the black record-buying public, about ten percent of the total USA population. The race was on, and Okeh, Paramount, and Columbia proceeded to flood the record market for the next four or so years (Victor opted to bye on this until the mid 1920's) with releases that now categorize the period as "The Classic Blues Era,"—a euphemism for "female professional vaudeville/cabaret singers who performed mostly for urban audiences using fairly standard song material"—this from the pages of Dixon-Godrich.

From the opening chapters of *Recording the Blues* by Dixon and Godrich (Stein and Day, 1970), we can get a more expansive picture of what transpired during this initial phase. Accessing these pages, one can assemble a capsulation of proceedings for the eventual journey to Richmond, Indiana. Readers are encouraged to resource this excellent book and the many other books and articles currently available that provide more in-depth background and information.

The big 3 dominate the race market...

Okeh Records (General Phonograph Corporation, NYC) initiated their 8000 race series in 1921 with the first releases featuring artists such as Daisy Martin, Esther Bigeou, Lizzie Miles, and Sara Martin. Mamie Smith's output was released on Okeh's ongoing general/popular 4000 series through to late 1923; some of her non-vocal "Mamie Smith's Jazz Hounds" sides (e.g., Nos. 8024, 8030, 8036) were released on the 8000 series, indicating a mar-

keting strategy here.

Paramount Records (New York Recording Laboratories, a subsidiary of the Wisconsin Chair Company of Port Washington, Wisconsin) initiated their 12000 race series in mid-1922 with the first releases featuring artists such as Alberta Hunter, Monette Moore, and Gladys Bryant—like Okeh, all NYC recordings.

Columbia Records (Columbia Graphophone Company, NYC) was in the swim of things with their releases on the popular A3000 series of artists such as Mary Stafford and Edith Wilson. Columbia emerges as one of the major blues labels with releases by their two "heavy hitters", Bessie Smith and Clara Smith in 1923, again on the popular A3000 series. Columbia started their 13000 race series at the end of 1923 but this was abandoned after eight issues because of marketing apprehensions of the buying public's superstitious fear of the number "13". Columbia quickly transitioned to the long lived 14000 race series in late December 1923.

Following along from the pages of *Dixon & Godrich*: "During this period (1923-1926) the big three (Okeh, Paramount and Columbia) dominated the market and together accounted for more than two thirds of the total blues and gospel releases. Race records were issued on more than fifteen different labels at this time (1921-1926), such as Emerson, Pathe/Perfect, Arto, Cameo, Black Swan (acquired by Paramount in April 1924), Edison, Gennett, Ajax, Brunswick, and Aeolian's Vocalion label (this record division was sold to Brunswick-Blake-Collender in late 1924).

Between 1923 and 1926, the great majority of blues records were by women, professional singers, who sang mostly for city audiences using 12-bar blues interspersed with a few traditional and popular numbers. The companies made little ef-

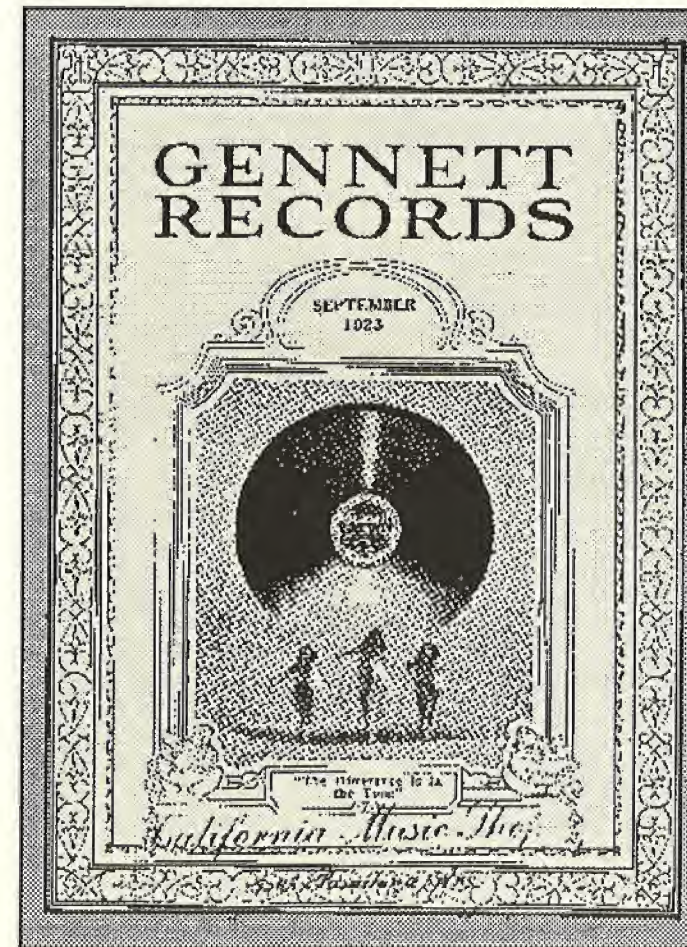
fort to seek out good or new talent. They relied on contacting singers who happened to be performing in the New York City area, or, in many cases, on the singer contacting them. There were too many record companies chasing too few singers in 1923. The more popular singers were contracted to one of the big three (OK/Para/Col); the less known singers recorded for many of the minor companies. For example, during this period, Rosa Henderson, Lena Wilson, and Hazel Myers each appeared on six different labels, and Edna Hicks on seven different company labels."

During this period, *Gennett Records*, a division of the Starr Piano Company of Richmond, Indiana, had one release in this genre in 1921—Daisy Martin on Gennett 4712. Then, starting in 1923, they added to their catalog so that by 1924 their classic blues artists were Viola McCoy, Julia Jones, Mandy Lee, Edna Hicks, Helen McDonald, and Josie Miles. All of these sides were recorded in Gennett's NYC studio, and it's apparent that these sides reflected the output of a minor label featuring the lesser known female singers.

Slowly, the major labels began to expand from their NYC blues recording base and to branch out in an effort to record new artists. Paramount recorded their first blues sides in Chicago in June 1923 with Ida Cox, Edna Taylor, and their NYC "veteran," Monette Moore. These blues sides were interspersed with jazz sides by Jelly Roll Morton and Ollie Power groups; all within a matrix block of nos. 1431 to 1450, surrounded by NYC recordings (1429/1430 by Perry Bradford's Jazz Phools and 1451/1452 by Mae Scott). Paramount continued their 1923 Chicago activity with additional matrix block sessions—July/August, mx. nos. 1486 to 1509 (Ida Cox, Monette Moore, Ollie Powers); October, mx. nos. 1528 to 1545 (Alberta Hunter, Ida Cox, Ollie Powers, Anna Oliver, and Young's Creole Jazz Band); and concluded the year with their first recordings by Ma Rainey which indicated another dimension in blues artists—the reach towards the more rural, less sophisticated, female artist—December, mx. nos. 1587 to 1624 (Ma Rainey, Edmonia Henderson, Ida Cox, John Churchill, Young's Creole Jazz Band, Wade's Moulin Rouge Orch., and King Oliver's Jazz Band)

Okeh journeys to Atlanta in June, 1923...

Okeh, with Ralph Peer at the helm of their 8000 race series, initiated their territorial recording with a journey to Atlanta in June 1923 to record white country artists and popular bands (Charlie Fulcher, Warner's Seven Aces). Presumably as a trial venture, Peer recorded Lucille Bogan and Fannie Mae Goosby at this time and these two sides were coupled on Okeh 8079. Over the following eight years, Okeh was to make thirteen territorial trips to Atlanta, providing more and more of the rural blues for their 8000 series race label. In this same year of 1923, Okeh's other blues artists not recorded in the NYC studio were Mary Bradford and Ada Brown in St. Louis in October, and Sippie Wallace, "Peachtree" Payne, and Charles Anderson in Chicago in October. Columbia, for their initial 13000/14000 race series label releases, continued to use NYC blues artist recordings with the exception of two King Oliver Jazz Band releases (Col 13003, 14003) which were recorded in Chicago.



With all of the above as a background, we transition to the Gennett location in Richmond, Indiana. A decision was made in 1923 to augment the modest Gennett blues catalog by adding Richmond recordings to the NYC studio output. The NYC-produced releases fell into the usual limited scope of the time—the professional female vocalists. A display of these issues is afforded by the reproduction of the 1924 Gennett catalog section entitled, "Gennett Colored Artist Records", as published in *Storyville* 75 (Feb/Mar 1978, pages 94 to 98). Aside from the artist names associated with NYC and the other blues labels, one finds listed: Sammie Lewis, Callie Vassar, King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, Richard M. Jones, Art Landry's Syncopating Six, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, and Ferd (Jelly Roll) Morton. A scattering of new names (including two white groups!) that is reflective of Gennett's geographical location in the mid-west.

It would appear that because of this location, Gennett, for their Richmond studio recordings, drew upon those artists who were appearing professionally in Indianapolis,

Cincinnati, Louisville, Chicago, and St. Louis—all locations with a significant black population that could support the theaters and cabarets in which these artists would perform. Additionally, Gennett was not a high budget record operation featuring "exclusive artists" bound by lucrative recording contracts and the promise of best-selling records with attendant flowing record royalties, but rather, a unique situation that was premised upon regional artists and regional record sales.

So, with the above rambling and somewhat general background, we propose to initiate a review of the Gennett blues output centered in their Richmond studio, with sidetracks to Chicago, St. Paul and Birmingham, starting with the acoustical period (1923-1925), into the electrical recordings (Electrobeam Gennett), and finishing with the low price Champions which carried through until August 1934. The common thread among these artists of differing styles and varying abilities will be their relative obscurity in relation to those blues artists recorded on the major labels. It is this that continues to fascinate, intrigue, and appeal to the blues collector.

It is assumed that the reader has access to *Blues and Gospel Records, 1902-1943* (R.M.W. Dixon and J. Godrich, Storyville Publications, 1982) so that to conserve space, the discographical "line data" will not be repeated herein. The Gennett acoustical period matrix listing (11000 thru 11777, August 1921 to February 1924), as published in *VJM* sometime in the 1960's, was used for the preliminary artist/title search for the early recordings. The following electrical period recording data will be back-searched through copies of the Gennett/Champion ledgers as obtained from the John MacKenzie Archives at the Indiana Historical Society by courtesy of Ms. Sally Childs-Helton, in charge of the Manuscripts Catalog.

Sammie Lewis (vocal) and Mandy Randolph (piano), 30 April and 29 May 1923.

Curiously, Gennett's first instance of a black male vocalist, whose titles suggest a blues background, turns out to be a theater performer whose artistic style is that of a female impersonator. The first two sides were commercially issued on Gnt 5147 ("Crazy Over Daddy"/"Cootie Crawl"), and six of the re-

GREEN LABEL GENNETTS

The Old Refrain (Muttallath-Kissler)	10075
Kashmir Song (Woodforde-Fiden)	90
Oriental (Cui)	10077
A Song of India (Clawson-Indone) (Ritzy-Kornelov)	90
Scipione Guidi—Violin, Piano Acc. Thos. Grinnell	

NUMBERS OF VARIED APPEAL

The Song of Triumph	5178
In the Woods My Master Went	75
Volcan In La (Clairz DeBuerie)	5163
Gladiali (Valse) (DeBuerie-Clairz)	75
Nathan Clairz—Saxophone Solo	
Irish Boy (One Step)	5168
The Rights of Man (Irish Hornpipe) Intro: Hanney's Horn	75
Barcarolle (O'Brien)	5170
Melody in F (Rubenstein)	75
Art Laundry and His Call of the North Orch.	
Honolulu Rag (Lester)	5175
Ferris & Franchini—Hawaiian Guitars	75
Hawaiian Blues (Motzart-Jones)	
Frank Ferris's Hawaiian Quartette	
Jazzin' Babylon Blues (Jones)	5171
12th Street Rag (Bowman)	75
Richard M. Jones—Piano Solo	

POPULAR SONG HITS

Chirpin' The Blues (Hunter)	5162
Just Thinkin' (A Blues) (Grainger-Rickard)	75
Viola McCoy—Piano Acc. Porter Grinnell	
I Cried For You (Now It's Your Turn to Cry Over Me)	5163
(Friend Archibald-Lyrrer)	75
If I Know You Then As I Know You Now (Blues) Jones-Hanley	
Elliott Shaw—Piano Solo	
Maybe Someday (Spikes Bros.)	5172
All Night Blues (Jones)	75
Callie Vassar—Piano Acc. Richard Jones	
Long Lost Mama (Woods)	5175
Wish I Had You (And You Gonna Get You Blues) (Grainger-Rickard)	75
Viola McCoy—Piano Acc. Porter Grinnell	
That Thing Called Love (Bradford)	5177
Live Johnson Got Better Bread Than Sully Lee (Bailey)	75
Julia Jones, Contralto—Piano Acc. Perry Bradford	

Gennett Supplement—September, 1923...

maining thirteen sides (including one Mandy Randolph piano solo) were pressed on Gennett "Specials" (dark green and gold labels per VJM matrix inventory listing introduction) which suggests that they were pressed in limited quantities for the artist's own personal use, perhaps to be sold during his theatrical tour appearances. The vocal performances here are basically crooning ditties with nothing to recommend them for blues interest. Mandy Randolph's piano accompaniment is quite competent including piano intros and middle-spot solos. The Gennett 1924 catalog does show a picture of Sammie Lewis, posed wearing a peak cap and lighting a

cigarette, which photo staging would indicate an experienced professional theatrical performer. Lewis later recorded in 1926 for Okeh and Vocalion (on Vocalion, four sides were issued with a jazz band accompaniment). The most extensive background on Sammie Lewis can be found in *Storyville* 78 (Aug/Sep 1978) - an article by Laurie Wright, Dick Raichelson's liner notes to his Arcadia LP 2008, and Dick Spottswood's liner notes to Library of Congress LBC 5.

Callie Vassar (vocal) and Richard M. Jones (piano), 31 May or 1 June 1923.

Gennett, following in the classic

female blues mode, reached to Chicago for their next Richmond blues session and recorded an obscure female vocalist accompanied by a pianist/composer who was quite active and important to the Chicago jazz and blues scene over the next two decades—Richard M. Jones. The first title, "I'm Lonesome, Nobody Cares For Me," probably a Jones' composition, is a typical "blues ballad" of the time Callie Vassar has good vocal projection in her natural middle range, but her voice becomes somewhat strained and breaking when she reaches for the higher notes. R.M. Jones provides a nicely attuned piano accompaniment with interesting right hand fills.

Maybe Someday" is a Spikes Brothers' composition first recorded in the Los Angeles area June 1922 by Ruth Lee accompanied by Spikes Seven Pods of Pepper/Ory's Sunshine Orchestra on the celebrated and rare Nordskog/Sunshine labels, featuring the first instance of black New Orleans jazz musicians on record (Kid Ory, Mutt Carey, Dink Johnson, etc.). Callie Vassar's version is a pleasant rendition of this ballad, remaining faithful to the Ruth Lee original. Additional versions were recorded by Alberta Hunter (Para 12066, Oct 1923) and Hazel Myers (Voc 14861, Aug 1934). "All Night Blues" is a R.M. Jones' composition presenting Callie Vassar in a blues milieu. The tune structure is a mixture—4-bar piano intro/12-bar verse/16-bar first chorus/8-bar second chorus/12-bar piano solo/repeat 16-bar first chorus./repeat 8-bar second chorus. Jones shows that he was an experienced blues piano accompanist here. In a fine early blues side in the "classic" style. Clara Smith cuts a version soon after this (Col A3966) and Georgia White records a version fourteen and a half years later (Decca 7405, Oct 1937) that follows the format and lyrical verses most closely, except that the intermediate solo is by guitar and is 16 bars plus eight bars in length. The connection here would be Richard M. Jones who accompanied Georgia White on many of her Decca sides. As a Decca Chicago Blues A & R man, Jones was probably a great influence on Georgia White in assembling many of the blues tunes from the past into her vast repertoire. Many of them are Jones' compositions. Georgia White's "I'm Blue and Lonesome (Nobody Cares For



Ruth Lee—"the first instance of black New Orleans jazz musicians on record..."

Me)" (Decca 7450, Apr 1938) is a reprise of the first Callie Vassar title above—again the R.M. Jones connection—with excellent Lonnie Johnson guitar accompaniment.

"Original Stomps" is another excellent R.M. Jones composition—his piano captures the uptempo setting of the piece throughout—but the vocal lines force Callie Vassar into the upper range with the subsequent shrillness in her voice. Nonetheless, it is a captivating side that was again recorded as "The Stomps" in Nov 1924 by Thelma LaVizzo, accompanied by the New Orleans Creoles (including R.M. Jones on piano) on Para 12250, released also on Herwin 92012 as by Trilby Hargens and Silvertone 3547 as by Mabel Nance.

Thelma LaVizzo was an obscure classic blues vocalist who recorded only four sides in Chicago in 1924, yet her vocal style had much to recommend it in comparison to the output of her female blues peer group of the time. The instrumental lineup for the two New Orleans Creole sides is cornet, two saxes (one of the reedmen doubles on clarinet with a solo on "New Orleans Goofer Dust Blues"), and R.M. Jones on piano, and I assume, as contractor/leader for the date. The reedmen have

great "acoustic horn presence" and their sax duet accompaniment, including some slap-tonguing technique, is wonderfully evocative of the period.

An aural comparison of these two versions of Jones' "Original Stomps"/"The Stomps" is pleasantly rewarding. Interestingly, the 1924 Gennett catalog features photos of "Richard Jones" and Callie Vassar. I could find no references to Callie Vassar in the blues literature. This



"Jazzin' Babies Blues," a hauntingly beautiful presentation of his composition..."

session concludes with two Jones piano solos; "Jazzin' Babies Blues," a hauntingly beautiful presentation of his composition which King Oliver's Jazz Band recorded three weeks later in Chicago (Okeh 4975); and "Twelfth Street Rag," a spirited rendition of Euday Bowman's piano rag classic.

To my ears, this Vassar-Jones session in mid-1923 is the significant start of the Richmond studio generated output. I apologize for the excursions outside of the specific Gennett blues sides, but the inter-relationship of the artists/title versions/etc. is all part of the total fabric of recorded blues history, the background to which, in many cases, remains un-noted and unsung due to the obscurity of the artists and the rarity of the original 78 rpm recordings.

I would like to thank Roger Misiewicz, Jim Prohaska, and Pete Whelan for furnishing tape copies of sides covered herein and proposed for future discussion. Without their generous sharing, a survey such as this would be impossible. There is a possibility that Johnny Parth of Vienna, Austria may be motivated to reissue many of these sides not yet available on microgroove in his limited edition pressings.

Next time we'll continue in the Gennett acoustic blues period with the Nina Reeves/Jesse Crump Session in July 1923. □

Tom Tsotsi
28 Varick Road
Waban, Mass. 02168



(photo courtesy of RUTH BERG)

James McKune—high-school graduation, c. June, 1928

LETTERS FROM McKUNE... by Henry Renard

James McKune was one of the first collectors of folk, blues, and gospel records and in 1943 circulated a want list that was probably the first discography of this genre.

Writing about someone that you have not communicated with for almost 25 years is virtually impossible unless you happen to have total recall or voluminous notes of which I have neither. But what I do

have are letters written by James McKune to me that tell in his own words his motivation in collecting phonograph records. I had saved these letters to remind me of a time when record collecting was a continuous joy of new discoveries. The few collectors that were interested in blues records had no discographies to tell them who the accompaniments were by or any of the data that is so readily obtainable today.

We only knew we liked the music on these records and strived to contact other collectors with the same tastes. That is how I came to know James McKune.

My first knowledge of his existence was through the Records Wanted columns of *The Record Changer* magazine. In the January 1949 issue McKune placed an ad, offering \$5.00 for an E+ copy of Rev. D.C. Rice Vocalion 1262.

MC KU: JAMES MC KUNE 179 MARCY AVE.
BROOKLYN 11, NY

REV. D.C. RICE CO. GRAGATION

ANY	E	VO	\$2+	MC KU
1 M ON BATTLEFIELD	E+	VO 1262	5.00	MC KU

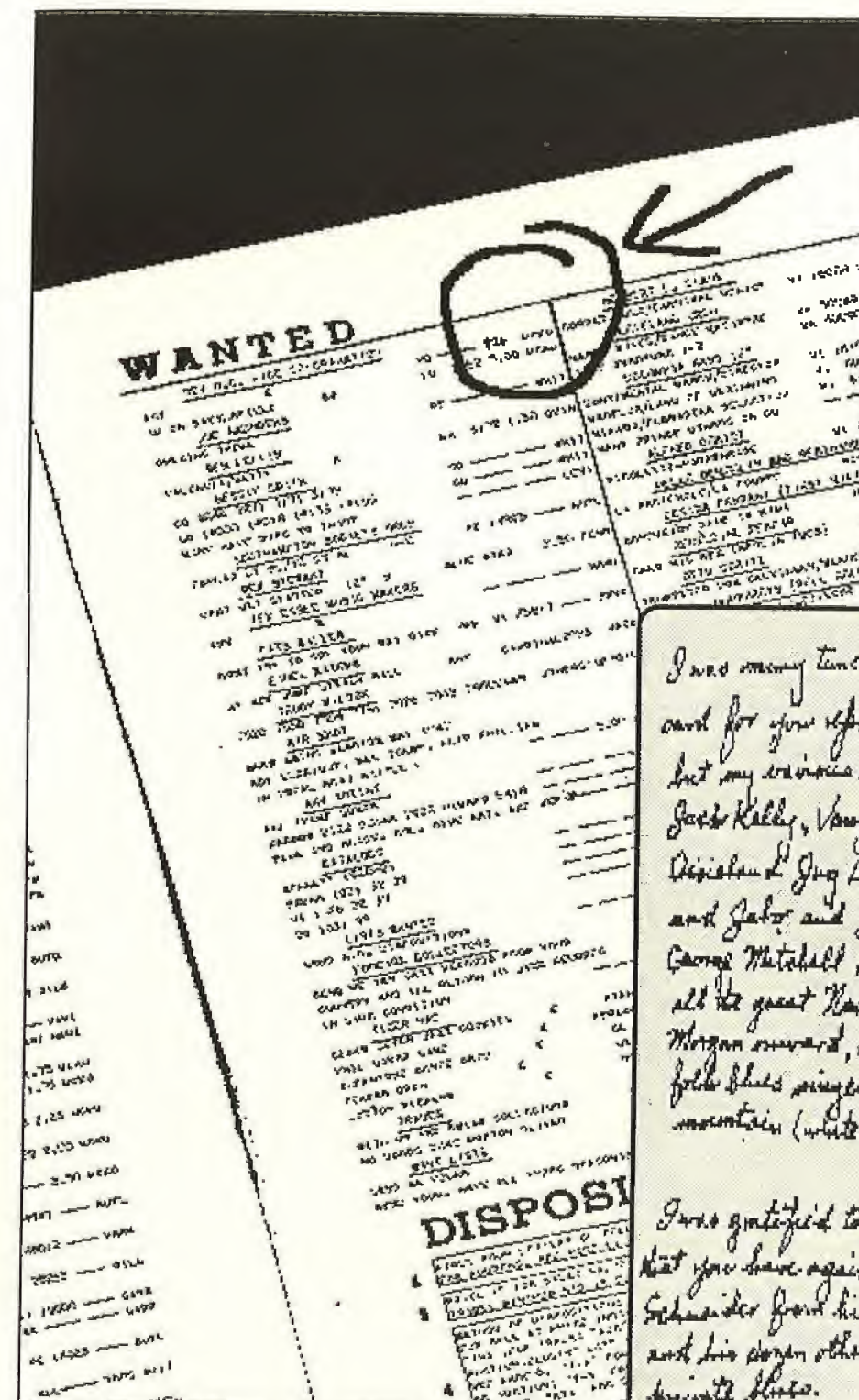
Another blues collector, Ronnie Lubin, and myself had been buying records from Jacob S. Schneider, who in 1948 was selling from his house in Fleetwood, N.Y. One of Ronnie's best finds at Jake's was a mint copy of Rev. Rice Vocalion 1502. We both liked it so much that we set about looking for other copies of Rev. Rice. We happened to see McKune's ad and thought we should contact him, since he was collecting in the same area. An exchange of letters took place and a meeting was arranged for early April 1949 at Lubin's apartment in the Bronx.

McKune was about 39 years old at the time we first met, but his hair was already showing grey. He was about medium height and extremely thin. He almost always wore a long sleeved white shirt with the sleeves rolled halfway up his arms. When Lubin would play a record that Jim had not heard before, he would laughingly nod his head in approval (if it pleased him). One of the records that Jim especially liked was the Southern Blues Singers, Gennett 6828 which he advertised for in the June 1949 *Record Changer*.

SOUTHERN BLUES SINGERS

LIGHTHOUSE BL	E	GE 6828	2.25	MC KU
LIGHTHOUSE BL	N	VS 6	1.50	MC KU

Ronnie played all his records at a high volume on an old RCA console, and I think this discouraged Jim from returning to Lubin's for some time, since he had to play his own



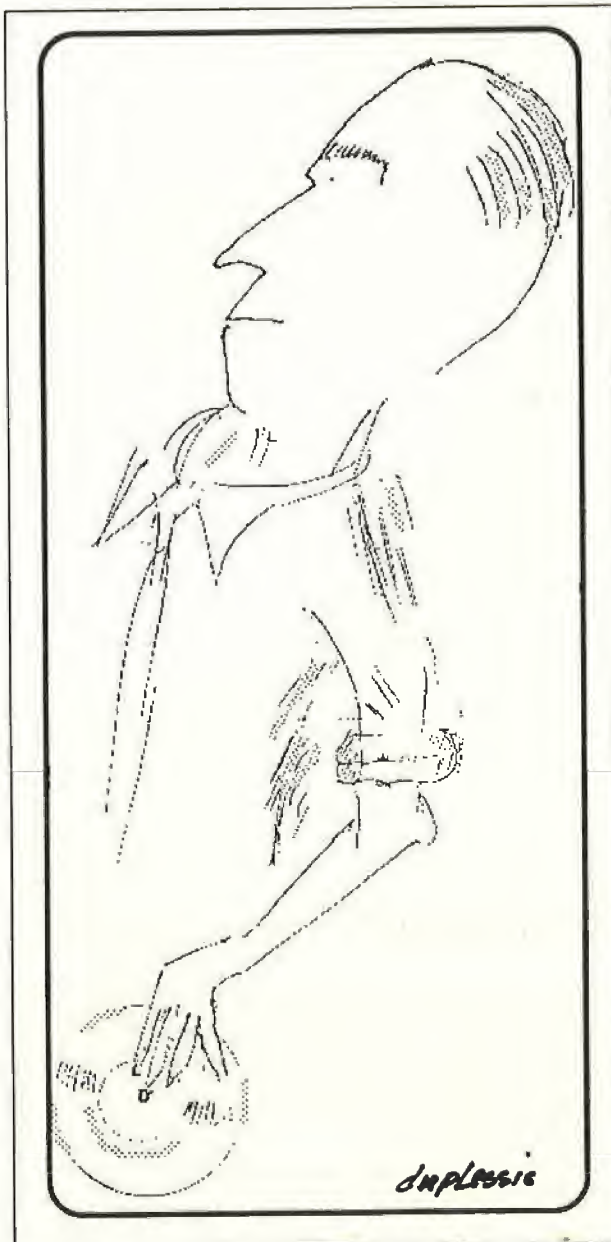
One of McKune's many ads in
The January, 1949 *Record Changer*...

I was many times delighted when I saw your card for your request to me not only yourself but my crinies masters: Roland, Earl Mc Donald, Jack Kelly, Vaughan, Clifford Hayes, the other Dixieland Jug Blowers, and Sugar Henderson, and Jack and Little Brother and George Mitchell and Ed Allen and all the great New Orleansians from Morgan onward, and a hundred folk blues singers and southern mountain (white) musicians.

I was gratified to hear from Pete that you have again saved Schneider from his hyperbolic and his own other private blues.

James

1952 Christmas card from McKune to Renard...



"McKune... was extremely thin. He almost always wore a long-sleeved white shirt with the sleeves rolled halfway up his arms."

phonograph at a low volume (due to the thin walls of his room in the YMCA on Marcy Ave. in Brooklyn, where he lived).

After this first meeting I often ran into McKune at the Jazz Record Center, 107 West 47th St. in NYC where I worked part time for the owner, Joe Claiborn—or "Big Joe"—as he was called by the record collectors who frequented his store on Saturdays. McKune would show up about six P.M., just as I was going to supper, and we would go around the corner on Sixth Avenue to the Automat and eat and discuss records for

about an hour. Then we would go back to Big Joe's who stayed open till about nine O'clock, and I would play Jim some of Sam Meltzer's reissues of classic jazz. We would talk while Joe would doze.

We would discuss the records Jim was currently advertising for in *The Record Changer* and any records at auction and what would be a respectable but not exorbitant bid to place. At another of our meetings he told me of his making trips to Camden N.J. to search out Victor and Bluebird records and the possibility

of test pressings that RCA employees might have taken home.

Most of Jim's records at this time were coming from lists that collector/dealers sent out on a limited schedule rather than from the pages of *The Record Changer*. One such supplier was Oliver W. Johnson of St. Louis, Missouri, who put out a small amount of hand-typed lists. Jim was also trading off some of his traditional jazz sides to collectors like Ellis Horne, the clarinet player in Lu Watters band (he collected Johnny Dodds and sent Jim blues records in exchange).

In the September 1949 *Record Changer* McKune advertised for:

BL ON BL — LABEL VOCALION
ANY WITH S.A. MASTER# 'S E VO — MCKU

"Blues on black label Vocalion, any with San Antonio master numbers." He was trying to locate other records made at the same sessions as Robert Johnson and Black Boy Shine. He felt the ad would pay for itself if some collector would only send him a list of the artist and record number of any S.A. prefix. If the price was right, he would buy the record, or just make use of the information. Again, I must mention the lack of any printed discography. It made collectors such as McKune come up with original ideas to gather information.

In the July-August 1950 issue of *The Record Changer* the following ad appeared:

JAMES MCKUNE
MCKUNE'S COMPREHENSIVE WANT LIST OF APR. 1943—3.00 MCKU

The ad was put in by collector Pete Kaufman, but I don't recall whether he knew McKune at the time, or if the ad led to a meeting between them, but I do know that they became friends about this time.

In August 1950 I started working for Jacob S. Schneider at 128 West 66th St. and really started filling in the gaps in my want list. Jake had a Scott record player in the back of his record rooms and he had no objections to my listening to records while I worked. In this way I was able to weed out many records on my want list that I had never heard, but after listening, decided they were not worth acquiring.

I also found many records at

Schneider's (he had 100,000) that were not on my want list at all. I didn't have time to listen to everything that looked good, so I would list the artists' names on a sheet of paper and then meet with McKune on Saturday at Big Joe's. We would discuss the names with potential. Then I would go back to work on Monday and listen to those that Jim thought were likely candidates for immortality. One such find was Gennett 6106, France Blues, by Sunny Boy and His Pals. Here is a sample of one of those weekly lists:

Charles Lindbergh	Frank Sinatra
Big Boy	Frank Sinatra
Big Boy	Frank Sinatra
Big Boy	Frank Sinatra
Big Boy	Frank Sinatra
Big Boy	Frank Sinatra
Big Boy	Frank Sinatra
Big Boy	Frank Sinatra
Big Boy	Frank Sinatra
Big Boy	Frank Sinatra

Handwritten notes and signatures, including "James McKune" and "Pete Kaufman".

With all this new knowledge coming in we knew what to bid on in auctions without getting fourth-rate records. But the response to wanted adverts was almost non-existent, and records at auction were equally scarce. So, in October 1950, McKune placed the following ad in *The Record Changer*.

REMINDER DEPT.
YOU MAY ANSWER MY ADS IN 1951
I'LL STILL WANT THIS STUFF — MCKU

finally got McKune to my home in Montvale, N.J. in late October of 1950. I was acquiring so many new records from Schneider in lieu of cash payments that I had to show them off. I introduced Jim to Joe Evans, Romeo 5080, New Huntsville Jail, and the reverse side, John Henry, by The Two Poor Boys. This record was unknown to McKune as was the Louis Lasky Vocalion 02955 "How You Want Your Rollin' Done." Jim immediately advertised for copies in the December issue of *The Changer* along with this ad:

TWO POOR BOYS
JOHN HENRY (10650) E RO 5080 MCKU
JOE EVANS
NEW HUNTSVILLE JAIL (10651) E RO 5080 1.75 MCKU
LOUIE LASKY
HOW U WANT ROLLIN' DONE V+ VO 02955 1.75 MCKU
YEAR'S END OBSESSION BL
I STILL SEEK MANY OLD WANTS — MCKU

About this time McKune decided to return to college. We could not meet at our usual Saturday times, because he had to earn money as a desk clerk at the YMCA on week-ends. We started corresponding by mail:

JAMES SKIP - Pm 13106 Hard Luck Child/4 O'Clock Blues.
Pm 13066 If You Haven't Got Any Hay/22-20 Blues. *
MILLER, LUELLA - Vo 1147 Tornado Groan/Muddy Stream Blues.
Vo 1081 Dreaming of You Blues/Rattlesnake Groan.
Vo 1102 Peeping at Rising Sun/Carrier Pigeon Blues.
CHARLIE PATTON - Pm 12909 High Water Everywhere/Part 2.
BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON - Co 14391 Jesus is Coming Soon/Gonna Run to the City.
REV. M.L. GIPSON - Pm 12555 John Done Saw That Holy Number/Sympathetic Christ.
CARLTON JUSTICE SINGERS - Or 8135 Shine on Me/Everytime I Feel the Spirit.
REV. BRADY - Or 1874 Lazarus Raised From the Dead/He is Risen.
FURRY LEWIS - Billy Lyons & Stack O' Lee.
LIZZIE WASHINGTON - Harwin 92040 Fall or Summer Blues/Mexico Blues.
LAURA HENTON - Co 14388 He's Coming Soon/Heavenly Sunshine.
TED ROSS - Or 15882 No Use to Hang Around/Clickety Clack Blues.
WASHINGTON PHILLIPS - Co 14404 What are They Doing in Heaven/Jesus is Friend.
WALTER ROLAND - Mm 60361 Dad Dream Blues/45 Pistol Blues.
REV. CLAYBORN - Vo 1082 Your Enemies Cannot Harm You/Gospel Train Coming.
ELDER BRYANT - Or 8579 How Much I Owe/Watch Ye Therefore.
ARIZONA DRANES - Or 8352 John Said He Saw a Number/My Soul is a Witness.
OK 8646 Just Look/Don't You Want To Go.

Dear Henry:

Prepare for a shock. At last I have a few records (listed above) which I am shipping you. They are in varying degrees of condition but if you have conversed with McKune and Pete Kaufman you are prepared for that.

I'd like nothing better than to have them all brand new but unfortunately I seldom find them that way.

On the Elder Bryant I believe that I shipped Jim one in his last order. But he tells me that he is going back to school and won't be able to buy many records for a while so I doubt if he will mind my sending it to you. The Washington Phillips if you have I think Pete might take.

I hope you don't retaliate by taking as long to write as I have but you see I made it eventually.

Regards

E. L. KESOE
311 1/2 E. Robinson Ave.
Orlando, Fla.

4. For I, you may mention. You may also accept the F
L. Miller Vo's as gifts of the singing is too much distorted
the same goes for Littleburying of who is hard to your taste
Don't I couldn't reply more. Singing like may to
while I am still surprised by that situation, some of the

First came this typewritten letter from Ed Kehoe along with a box of records on approval. Ed had been sending boxes of records to McKune and Pete Kaufman, but when Jim returned to school, he gave Ed my name to replace his. This was my first shipment. I graded the records and sent the list to Jim to price for me. The notes in script are McKune's—as are the prices. Incidentally, I still have the Patton record.

Sam Fichtelberg was the owner of a used record store on Sixth Avenue between 44th and 45th Streets. This was where McKune and I made our blues purchases in the early 1940's. Sam had bought the inventory of the Columbia-Okeh record distributor in 1940 when CBS bought the ARC labels. He had hundreds of mint Okeh Lonnie

In Montvale, N.J., where I lived in 1951, there was an unpaved, dirt road named Roland Street. Abe Kaufman was Pete's wealthy father.

Tell the village fathers that Roland Street is not to be paved. Maybe Abe Kaufman will pay for a heroic statue anon, showing our hero palming the entire keyboard of his original back-country Wurllitzer.

James

(photo courtesy HENRY REFIARD)

6/27/51

Dear Henry,

Recently I sent Kehoe a check for the three discs I pre-empted from Pete's last auction (after Ronnie had swindled Pete out of the gems and jewels therein).

I mailed the checks absent-mindedly to Kehoe at 623 Broadway, Albany, N.Y.—an address at which I once worked. When it came back, I sent it correctly. To appease Ed, I told him a few of the myths you and I had made up about him. I also said that we missed his fractional address from our mail.

Here is his postcard in answer. Because it has the well-known flavor, I pass it on to you. Be assured I told Ed that you and I are glad to come by his dug-up-in-a-swamp F- Pattons, Rolands, and TNT Burtons, no matter how (by what means) they come to us.

Your Christmas greeting I return. It is unfortunate for the world that the everyday Christianity of men like you and Mike and Pinto is not adopted throughout the year by the uncharitable multitude.

If they can be considerate and compassionate toward their fellow humans for one week a year, it would be wisdom to cultivate the same Christmas attitude indefinitely.

Let your mother see this reflection, so that she may see that I have not been deafened to all thinking by all the records I have listened to, this year.

From Schneider's arm's-length sale I was absent. That saved me money I may need badly toward the end of the next semester.

Naturally, I hated to loose promised Victors by white evangelical singers. But I can enjoy your copies whenever I have leisure enough in 1952.

Mike sent me an Easter card—a delightful variation, which I would have copied but for the lateness of this melancholy December.

James

December 23, 1951

McKune states he mailed a check to Kehoe at 623 Broadway, Albany N.Y., an address he once worked at. Could this be the record store where he listened to blues records as customers played them? Jim told me once that as a young man he worked one summer in a record store that was owned by a relative or friend of his family. This was his first introduction to blues records, so I presume it was in a black neighborhood or an area where blacks shopped. I recall he once told me the store where he worked was in Baltimore, but it could have been Albany.

The sentence "A few of the myths you and I had made up." This appears in the return addresses he would put on his envelopes:

VAUGHN'S RIVAL



Other myths were: Walter Roland could palm an entire 44-key piano with both hands and the Dixieland Jug Blowers having a pet Rhinoceros they had taught to grunt in tempo on their record, Vic 20770, of "If you can't make it easy"; right after the vocal, the Rhino grunts a chorus.

Sunday,
April 27, 1952

Dear Henry:

I should like to know the Columbia record numbers for the following W. Phillips records: DENOMINATION BLUES, 1 and 2; and that other one you told me about last night which I remarked that I hadn't known about previously. It may have been *What a Friend*; I do not now recall the conversation, phrase for phrase.

Witherspoon's shouting and Claiborne's snoring both distracted my attention from your brief rundown of topics as varied as Hungarian chanteuses, Mittag's early dream, Schneider's Saturday-night dilemma, and Big Joe on the March of Time.

This will be a good time, too, for you to give me record number and titles of the laudable sides you have by Whistler and His Jug Band, T.N.T. Burton, Rev. Rose, any other gospel singers of note on Pm (which I probably lack). Plus Victor catalog number and full titles for the Dixieland Jug Blowers *When I Stopped Running*. Also the number of Furry Lewis's Evergreen *Money Blues/Judge Harsh Blues*—if you know it.

As I write I am playing two sides by La Nina de Eleja who must have been recorded within the past 15 years. Many of the Flamenco singers out of Spain before Franco are very good. I have heard that Carmen Miranda in her youth (on Odeon) was tremendous. Hard to believe, tho'!

James

April 27, 1952

The only access record collectors had to label and master numbers were other collectors who actually had the record, or the lucky few who had manufacturers' catalogs. Even these were far from complete.

Brooklyn 11, New York
August 27, 1952

Dear Henry:

As I reminded you when I lent you that partial want list last year, I like many second- and third-rate performances on records. That is why I still crave as many records as I do.

At the same time I do not want to get any more stuff that is not to my taste, stuff that I will not listen to, no matter how highly it is rated by other collectors whose tastes I respect. You see, at least a hundred items are on my want list because other collectors recommended them, or because 'righteous' consensus over the years has rated them highly.

Many of that 'hundred' I have not heard, as yet. And I've heard the others only once or twice each, always under conditions not conducive to good listening: at Lubin's, in a deafening glare; at Kaufman's with talk distracting us from the turntable; or at Fichtelberg's, with bobby soxers eging me out after I had heard two or three bars.

That is why, anon, I want to borrow from you, by the cartonful, discs I am eager to hear and evaluate.

To mention one example of what I have alleged I wanted, but without certainty or conviction, there is the music of several Elythe groups. On my present want list I name Pm 12428, APE MAN/YOUR FOLKS, by the Elythe Washboard Ragamuffins, and Vocalions 1135 and 1136, WEARY WAY BLUES and HAVE MERCY/HOT STUFF, by Jimmy Elythe's Owls. Are these really fine performances? Or are they touted mostly because Elythe was present?

And how about those white Vocalion sides by Bertrand's Washboard Wizard: Vocalions 1035, 1060, 1099, 1280: which are the gems?

My old friend, Sam Ruvdich, used to like some of those sides exceedingly well. When he played three sides for me — he had Boris Rose dubs in those days (1945-1946), I was at once kindled by two of them. But I forget which two. Later, just last year, when I listened to Meltzer reissues of some of those Vocalions, amid the usual uproar at Big Joe's, I was unimpressed. Maybe the bad listening conditions spoiled the performances for me. Or maybe Meltzer's reissues came out 'dead.' Or maybe some of those sides were never for a man like me — addicted to folk music — in the first place.

When I see you again, please remember to play me any of the above-mentioned Elythe-Bertrand discs you happen to own. And to give me your own reactions to any you have rejected as not to your taste.

Separately now I am giving you the names of other performers and the records by each that I wish to borrow from you. I shall return any carton you lend me within 10 days, or sooner, if I see you sooner.

On a third sheet I have listed my Carter Family wants, so that you may correct any of the record numbers which do not match those on the list compiled by the National Hillbilly Record Exchange. Please mail that third sheet back to me as soon as you can.

AS ever, *James*

The rating of performances on record was what McKune and I had in common. When I worked at Schneiders', I would listen to all the Carter Family recordings he had and rate them accordingly. They were all good. Some were better and a few were unique. The same with Sleepy John Estes. He made about 51 sides, and of these, three or four were first rate, about six or seven

second rate, and the balance third rate. Even though every side by Estes was of high calibre, only a small amount would rate first. Some artists made only one or two records. These we judged by performance, not rarity. Rare does not mean good. To earn a first-class rat-

ing, we would judge lyrics; were they original or copied from another record? Did they tell a story? The voice of the singer had to be unique and easily recognizable a second time. The rougher the better! And the accompaniment sympathetic to the mood of the piece. If I seem to be describing Charlie Patton here, then he is the perfect example of first rate.

November or December 1963

After I sold my record collection to Jake Schneider in 1955, McKune sent me lists of records for sale from various sources, but money problems kept me from re-entering the field.

This was the last letter I received from him:

Dear Henry: When Mallory asked me who else might be interested in his list, I gave him your name.

Somehow, I distrust him. He bought some records from the Negroes in Charleston, S.C. He spent \$19 or \$20 and sold the records for more than \$500. This was 4 or 5 months ago. I got another Celestin record from him. He called it V+; I would call it G+. But it is a fine N.O. record and I paid only \$3.20.

The country blues singers go very high. Last auction Mallory had Sam Collins on B.P. I bid \$17. I have the record, F. M.'s copy was V+. A bid of \$39 and change won the Collins.

I am bidding low for two of the Rolands you circled. Bids of \$4.00 will top me. I did not bid for Dixieland Jug Blowers Florida Blues; I have it. It is, I think, their best record.

Another great record is Elder Oscar Sanders. I have it; it is tremendous. I am trying for D.C. Rice; I lack that one.

Somehow, I doubt that the religious stuff will get much play.

Beale Street Sheiks' Half cup of tea is very good, too. But it will go high because Mallory says it is RARE.

I am trying for John D. Fox, with Collins' guitar, and Skip James' Devil's Got My Woman. I have not yet submitted a final bid

on Fox; I realize he may be a poor singer. For James I am bidding, as I recall, \$9.35.

We probably won't see this stuff again.

Trouble with Kaufman is that he thinks today that every record is worth ten dollars. He sold some this year. I got the stuff no one else had ever heard of. Nine very good or great records for \$39. But McGee, Rice, Bukka White went abroad, and Kaufman averaged \$9 per record. For a Patton on Vocalion, Stone Pony Blues, V+, Klatzko of Glen Cove paid Kaufman \$65.

The really great man was Kehoe. I used to pay him \$25 for a whole box of records. Some were beat to hell, but every one was prodigious.

You will remember that I got to him first, and that I immediately shared him with you, Kaufman and Stendahl. You know, all together

On my vacation this year I tried to find House and Bertha Lee, Patton's wife, 1934-36, in Chicago. I failed. I'll try again next year. House may be dead. But I am almost certain Bertha Lee is alive. When Patton died, circa 1936, she was only 19 or so.

So long,

Today I am feeling better. I have two pay checks (for 4 weeks' work) but I have no place to cash them. (the 'Y' collected no money today.) And in my pocket I have \$7.

Ah, well, that is the lucky number. And so I shall not worry.

That's all he wrote. □

he found us 29 Patton records. The guys in Europe who have Patton today bought your copies from Schneider. And Whelan paid \$17 for one of yours.

When I visit you, I'll call in advance. But in the P.O., you must always work late. I work 1:30 to 10 p.m.

My best day to visit you would be a Saturday. Let me know if that is O.K.

Whelan would come, too. He wants to talk with you about some of the singers he has reissued.

Whelan sells his Origins himself. Pete Whelan, 39 Remsen St., Brooklin 1.

He put out Origin 2, all great country singers; origin 3, 12 or 14 by Henry Thomas, Ragtime Texas; Origin 4, the great jug bands; origin 5, the Mississippi Blues, 1927-1940. Sixteen sides by Bukka White, Willie Brown, Kid Bailey, Robert Wilkins, Son House, John Hurt, William Harris, Skip James.

THE RAREST 78s—A to B

My specialty is
Electrobeam
Gennett...

My focus is on
Autograph...

My area of expertise
is the Paramount
13,000 series...

(Make me
an offer!)

Here's
What
Experts
Say...

"Big overcoats with large, wide pockets are 'in' this year!"



In the 20 years since this feature last appeared some "self-evident" truths have emerged. Almost all rare 78s are in "the hands of collectors." That straight jacket of classic jazz (i.e., the Armstrong Hot 5, Oliver Gennetts) has become a witch's brew of exotica. Who in 1945 would have thought a Bubbling Over Five OKeh more sensuous and desired than an Armstrong Hot Five OKeh? Moreover, rare country blues are worth more than rare jazz. Only the rarest blues and the rarest jazz (no known copies) are about equal in value. The missing blues Paramounts will probably never emerge. The story behind those that have is stranger than fiction.

Some mythical Electrobeam Gennetts and late 16,000's black-label Champions (we've always wondered about) have come to light, leaving only a few in the shadows—most of which are on late Paramount (12900 through 13100's): Big Bill "Broomsley"—Pm 13084; Willie Brown—Pm 13099; King Solomon Hill—Pm 13125; Son House—13096; Blind Joe Reynolds—Pm 12983; and a few others. We've listed issued 78s only. The best Tommy Johnsons of all may be his two unissued versions of "Mornin' Prayer Blues" (L-231-1 and L-231-2), part of a Paramount test caché found by Mike Kirsling in 1985 (this, a "truth is stranger than fiction" feature by Bob Hilbert, will appear in 78 Quarterly's Vol. 4). Still missing are nine William Harris Gennett sides.

How much are 78s really worth? This subject is covered nicely (and for the first time, authentically) in the just-published—WINNING BIDS—

Actual Prices Paid For Jazz And Blues (170-plus pages—Pumpkin Productions, Inc., P.O. Box 7963, Miami, FL 33255—\$16.95—post-paid in the U.S.)—written and edited by Bob Hilbert.

For the moment at least, we've decided on four (dangerously overlapping) categories: Guitar Blues, Jazz, Piano, and String/Jug/Skiffle.

What did we leave out? Help us fill the missing gaps. Let us know if you have any of these rare 78s (can we use your name in a final tally of copies?). Propose outrageous suggestions. Criticize. Are we biased against 1930's swing bands? Should we begin a listing of rare black religious groups? Should we include a rare "Country & Western" section?

GUITAR BLUES

Garfield Akers—Cottonfield Blues-Part 1/Cottonfield Blues-Part 2—Vocalion 1442—estimated five copies.
Garfield Akers—Dough Roller Blues/Jumpin' And Shoutin' Blues—Vocalion 1481—estimated five copies.
Kid Bailey—Mississippi Bottom Blues/Rowdy Blues—Brunswick 7114—estimated five (or more) copies.
Willie Baker—Weak-Minded Woman/Sweet Patunia Blues—Gennett 6751; Mama, Don't Rush Me Blues/No No Blues—Gennett 6766; Bad Luck Moan/Ain't It A Good Thing?—Gennett 6812; Crooked Woman Blues/Rag Baby—Gennett 6846—We can probably assume there are less than five copies of each Gennett.
Barefoot Bill—Barefoot Bill's Hard Luck Blues/One More Time—Columbia 14561—(not surprisingly, his rarest sides are his most lackadaisical).
Wiley Barner—My Gal Treats Me Mean.../If You Want A Good Woman—

Gennett 6261—(side 2 appears only on Gennett)—estimated five (or less).
Ed Bell—Mamlsh Blues/Hambone Blues—Paramount 12524; Mean Conductor Blues/Frisco Whistle Blues—Paramount 12546—estimated five (or more) of each.
Big Bill And Thomps—House Rent Stomp/Big Bill Blues—Paramount 12656—only about three known copies of this great, but elusive item.
Bill And Slim—Papa's Gettin' Hot/(Big Bill Johnson)—Champion 16015—Appears only on Champion; estimated less than ten.
Francis Blackwell—(see under PIANO).
Scraper Blackwell—Kokomo Blues/Peal Farm Blues—Vocalion 1192—Surprisingly few of these Scraper Vocalions ever show up. Estimated five or less.
Scraper Blackwell—Mr., Scraper Blues/Down and Out Blues—Vocalion 1417—estimated less than five.
Scraper Blackwell—Trouble Blues-Part 1/Trouble Blues-Part 2—estimated less than five.
Scraper Blackwell—Springtime Blues/(Teddy Moss)—Gennett 7158—no known copies.
Scraper Blackwell—Springtime Blues/(James Platt)—Champion 15973—two known copies.
Scraper Blackwell—Hard Time Blues/Back Door Blues—Champion 16361—one known copy, E condition.
Scraper Blackwell—Ramblin Blues/Sneaking Blues—Champion 16370—one known copy, E.
Scraper Blackwell Down South Blues/Blue Day Blues—Champion 16472—two known copies, one E, the other V. As late as 1954, Jake Schneider had the three Blackwells above in E condition. They were "sold to an unidentified European collector."
Scraper Blackwell—Blue Day Blues/Sneaking Blues—Superior 2765. no known copies.
Scraper Blackwell—Down South Blues/Back Door Blues—Superior 2782. no known copies.
Scraper Blackwell—Hard Time Blues/Ramblin Blues—Superior 2827. no known copies.
Scraper Blackwell—D Blues/A Blues—

Bluebird B5914—only two known copies, apparently, and one of them is cracked.
Blind Blake—Rope Stretching Blues—Part 1/Rope Stretching Blues—Part 2—Paramount 13103—one known copy.
Blind Blake—Champagne Charlie Is My Name/Depression's Gone From Me Blues—Paramount 13137—one known copy, possibly two.
Alonzo Boone—Kansas City Blues/Electric Chair Blues—Supertone 9428—Two known copies, both less than V.
Ishman Bracey—Woman Woman Blues/Suitcase Full Of Blues—Paramount 12970—two known issued copies, one V/V-, the other listed as F. (other Bracey Paramounts listed under String/Jug/Skiffle).
Mississippi Bracy—Cherry Ball/Stered Gal (Stir It Gal)—OKeh 8867—Two known copies, E and E-.
Mississippi Bracy—You Scolded Me And Drove Me From Your Door/I'll Overcome Someday—OKeh 8904—one known copy, E.
Tommie Bradley—When You're Down And Out/(James Cole)—Champion 16308—one known copy, V- to V.
Tommie Bradley—When You're Down And Out/(Four Day Blues)—Superior 2736—one known copy, E- (see other Tommie Bradley's under STRING/JUG/SKIFFLE).
"Hi" Henry Brown—Nut Factory Blues/Skin Man Blues—Vocalion 1692—three known copies.
"Hi" Henry Brown—Hospital Blues/Brown Skin Angel—Vocalion 1715—one known copy.
"Hi" Henry Brown—Titanic Blues/Preacher Blues—Vocalion 1728—two (possibly three) known copies.
Lottie Brown—Lost Lover Blues/Wayward Girl Blues—Supertone 9286—estimated less than ten.
Lottie Brown—Rolling Log Blues/Goin' Away Blues—Supertone 9367—estimated less than 15 (the Supertone, Champions, and Paramount were pressed from a different, "cleaner" mother/stamper than either the Gennett or Varsity).
Lottie Brown—Don't Speak To Me/(Clara Herring, pseud.?)—Supertone 9289—no known copies on either Supertone or Gennett.
Willie Brown—M & O Blues/Future Blues—Paramount 13090—two known copies, G or less.
Willie Brown—M & O Blues/Future Blues—Champion 50023—about four known copies.
Willie Brown—Kicking In My Sleep Blues/Window Blues—Paramount 13099—no known copies.
John Byrd—Old Timbrook Blues/Billy Goat Blues—two known copies, both E.

JAZZ

Alabama Fuzzy Wuzzies—Fuzzy Wuzzies/(The Memphis Strutters)—Champion 15415—estimated less than five.
Alabama Harmony Boys—Chicken Supper Strut/(New Orleans Strutters)—Champion 15398; Chicken Supper Strut/Sweet Patootie—Silverstone 5139—estimated less than five.
Alabama Jazz Pirates—Canned Heat Blues/(? not listed in Rust)—Bell 1182—no known copies of The Triangle Harmony Boys on Bell.
Danny Altier—I'm Sorry Sally/My Gal Sal—Vocalion 15740—Jake Schneider

considered this the rarest jazz 78 on Vocalion. He never came across a copy during the 40 years it took him to amass over 500,000 78s—estimated less than five.
Lovie Austin And Her Serenaders—Gallon Stomp/Chicago Mess Around—Paramount 12380—estimated only five or six copies; of these, only two are E or better.
Lovie Austin and Her Serenaders—In The Alley Blues/Merry Maker's Twine—Paramount 12391—estimated six or seven copies.
Maynard Baird And His Orchestra—Postage Stomp/I Can't Stop Lovin' You—Vocalion 1516—estimated less than ten.
Maynard Baird And His Southern Serenaders—I Can't Keep From Loving That Gal/I'm Sorry I Said Goodby—Vocalion 15834—estimated less than five.
Barbecue Joe And His Hot Dogs—Up The Country Blues/Weary Blues—Gennett 7320—only one known copy (V) of the last jazz record issued on Electrobeam Gennett.
Barbecue Joe And His Hot Dogs—Shake That Thing/Big Butter And Egg Man—Champion 16192—two known copies.
Slim Bartlett And His Orchestra—Asphalt Walk/Rock And Gravel—Superior 2692—no known copies.
Berlyn Baylor And His Orchestra—Clarinet Marmalade (13651)/Riverboat Shuffle—Gennett 6457—two or three copies.
Berlyn Baylor And His Orchestra—Clarinet Marmalade (13651-A)/Riverboat Shuffle—Champion 16422—two known copies E or better; probably two or three more.
Bennett's Swamplanders—Big Ben/You Can't Be Mine And Someone Else's too—Columbia 14557—estimated ten or less and at least one is on blue wax. (the other Bennett, Columbia 14662, omitted as "disappointing").
Jimmy Bertrand's Washboard Wizards—I'm Going Huntin'/If You Want To be My Sugar Papa—Vocalion 1099—estimated ten to 15.
Jimmy Bertrand's Washboard Wizards—Easy Come Easy Go Blues/The Blues Stampede—Vocalion 1100—

estimated ten to 15.
Jimmy Bertrand's Washboard Wizards—Isabella/I Won't Give You None—Vocalion 1280—estimated ten or less.
Beverly Syncopators—Sugar/(Clarence Jones)—Paramount 12747—three known copies of this suspected Keppard item.
Birmingham Bluetette—Old Man Blues/Back Home Blues—Herwin 92019—(has it been decided if side one is Klien Tindull on Paramount 12377?)—two known copies.
Bix And His Rhythm Jugglers—Toddlin' Blues/Davenport Blues—Gennett 5654—probably 15 or more of Bix's most New Orleansian record.
Blackbirds Of Paradise—Bugahoma Blues/Tishomingo Blues—Gennett 6210—estimated at about six, half of those with cracks and bites.
Blackbirds Of Paradise—Sugar/Muddy Water—Gennett 6211—only two known copies on Gennett.
Blackbirds Of Paradise—Razor Edge/Stompin' Fool—Black Patti 8053—no known copies; the one offered at auction some years ago never existed.
Blythe's Washboard Band—Bohunkus Blues/Buddy Burton's Jazz—Paramount 12368—probably the second rarest Dodds Paramount; estimated less than five.
Jimmie Blythe And His Ragmuffins—Messin Around (-1, -2)/Adam's Apple—Paramount 12376—fewer copies of take one; grand total probably exceeds 15.
Blythe's Washboard Ragamuffins—Ape Man/Your Folks—Paramount 12428—estimated less than ten.
Jimmy Blythe's Owls—Weary Way Blues/Poutin' Papa—Vocalion 1135—estimated less than 10.
Jimmy Blythe's Owls—Hot Stuff/Have Mercy—less than 10.
Jimmy Blythe's Washboard Wizards—My Baby/Oriental Man—less than 10, but most of these are E or better.
Perry Bradford's Jazz Phools—Lucy Long/I Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle—considering the number offered in *The Record Changer* between 1945 and 1949, there must be thirty copies of this famous classic E or better.
Vi Bradley And Her Rhythmettes—



Two known copies...



Four copies estimated...



Two known copies...

Stardust/(Floyd Mills)—Champion 16264—one known copy, E.
King Brady's Clarinet Band—Embar-rasment Blues/Lazybone Blues—about five copies of the obscure New Orleans clarinetist, "Kid Ernest" "Mike" Michall on Gennett 6393.
Broadway Pickers—Salty Dog/Steal Away—a Dodds item that doesn't sound like Dodds, a version of "Salty Dog" that doesn't sound like "Salty Dog." But, we're still curious to know if any copies ever showed up on Broadway.
Lottie Brown—Blue World Blues/(Ruby Gowdy)—Supertone 9429—(listed in Jazz section because of the spectacular cornet acc., once thought to have been Tommy Ladnier)—no known copies.
Harvey Brooks' Quality Four/Jessie Derrick With Brooks' Quality Four—Frankie And Johnny/Mistreating Daddy—Hollywood 1008—about four known copies.
Harvey Brooks' Quality Four/Jessie Derrick With Brooks' Quality Four—Nobody's Sweetheart/If You'll Come Back—Hollywood 1021—there's a copy of this "floating around somewhere."
Harvey Brooks' Quality Four/Jessie Derrick With Brooks' Quality Four—Hollywood 1022—a copy of this somewhere (you know who you are out there).
Sam Browne And His Orchestra—Hard Times Stomp/(?—not listed in Rust)—Superior 2693—no known copies of Red Perkins on Superior.
Kid Brown And His Blue Band—Bo-Lita/(Al Miller's String Band)—Black Patti 8049—two known copies.
Merritt Brunies And His Friars Inn Orchestra—Up Jumped The Devil/Follow The Swallow—Autograph (no number)—estimated four or five copies.
Merritt Brunies And His Friars Inn Orchestra—Angry/I Weep Over You—Autograph 610—about the same number.
Merritt Brunies And His Friars Inn Orchestra—Flag That Train (To Alabama)/Clarinet Marmalade—Autograph 624—two or three.
Frank Bunch And His Fuzzy Wuzzies—Fuzzy Wuzzy/(Northwest Melody Boys)—Gennett 6278—estimated less than 10.
Frank Bunch And His Fuzzy Wuzzies—Fourth Avenue Stomp/Congo Stomp

(GEX-833)—Gennett 6293—estimated less than 10.
Frank Bunch And His Fuzzy Wuzzies—Fourth Avenue Stomp/Congo Stomp (GEX-833-A)—Herwin 92044. No known copies on Herwin.
Johnny Burris And His Orchestra—I'll Never Forget/So Comfy—Gennett 6850—estimated less than five.

PIANO

Alabama Jim And George—Crossin' Beale Street/Memphis Rhythm—Gennett 6905—no known copies; Supertone 9475—somewhere between five and ten copies on Supertone.
Alabama Jim—Don't Cry Pearl/All Over You—Gennett 6918—no known copies.
Alabama Jim—Deep Blue Sea/Leave Town or Be A Clown—Gennett 6949—no known copies; Supertone 9513—no known copies.
Mozelle Alderson And Blind James Beck—Mozelle Blues/State Street Special (piano solo with speech)—Black Patti 8003—about five copies known.



Two known copies...

Mozelle Alderson And Blind James Beck—Sobbin' The Blues/Room Rent Blues—Black Patti 8004—about three copies.
Mozelle Alderson—Mobile Central Blues/Tall Man Blues—Black Patti 8029—one known copy.
Charles Avery/Meade Lux Lewis (piano solos)—Dearborn Street Breakdown/Honky Tonk Train—Paramount 12896—estimated about ten, all E or better.
Barbecue Pete (piano solos)—Avenue Strut/Easy Drag—Champion 15904—In 1960 there was one known copy. About seven have shown up since then, V+ or better.
Billie Barnes/Hatch Seward (piano solos)—Dearborn Street Breakdown/Honky Tonk Train—Broadway 5063—at least one copy on Broadway.
Black Diamond Twins (piano duet)—Block And Tackle/(Alabama Rascals)—ARC (Banner 32425, Oriole 8137, Perfect 0206, Romeo 5137)—estimated less than fifteen.
Francis Blackwell—Morning Mail Blues/Blues That Make Me Cry—Vocalion 02752—two known copies.
Eubie Blake (piano solo)—Ma/(Irving Kaufman)—Emerson 10450, Symph-nola 4360, Pathe ?—Possibly Blake's rarest piano solo. We only know of one copy on Emerson.
Jimmy Blythe (piano solos)—Lovin's Been Here And Gone To The Mecca Flat/Mr. Freddie Blues—Paramount 12370—estimated less than five.
Jimmy Blythe (piano solos)—Alley Rat/Sweet Papa—Vocalion 1181—between eight and ten; all known copies E or better (not the kind of record that inspires many replays).
Blythe And Burton (piano duets)—Dustin' The Keys/Block And Tackle Blues—Gennett 6502—about six copies ranging from E+ down to G+.
Blythe And Clark (piano duets)—Bow To Your Papa/Don't Break Down—Champion 16451—two known copies. E and E+.
C.H.H. Booth (piano solo)—Creole Bells/(one-sided)—Victor 1079—no known copies of the first recorded

ragtime piano solo (1901).
Broadway Rastus (piano solos)—Rock My Soul/Whoopee Stomp—Paramount 12764—about three known copies.
Henry Brown (piano solos)—Deep Morgan Blues/Eastern Chimes Blues—Paramount 12988—three or four known copies.
Buddie Burton—Ham Fatchet Blues—Part I/Ham Fatchet Blues—Part II—Paramount 12625—one known copy.
Burton And Moman—Crossin' Beale Street/Memphis Rhythm—Champion 15774—estimated between five and ten copies.

STRING/JUG/SKIFFLE

Alabama Sheiks—Sittin' On Top Of The World/The New Talkin' About You—Victor 23261—two known copies.
Alabama Sheiks—Travelin' Railroad Man Blues/Lawdy Lawdy Blues—Victor 23265—We know there're copies around, but we haven't seen any.
Will Batts—Country Woman/Highway No. 61 Blues—Vocalion 02531—estimated less than ten.
Will Batts—Cheatin' Woman/Cadillac Baby—Vocalion 02540—estimated less than ten.

Blind Percy And His Blind Band—Coal River Blues/Fourteenth Street Blues—Paramount 12584—two known copies.
Louie Blule And Ted Bogan—There's Nothing In This Wide, Wide World For Me/I'm Through With You—Bluebird B5490—estimated less than five.
Louie Blule And Ted Bogan—State Street Rag/Ted's Stomp—Bluebird B5593—estimated less than five.
Booker Orchestra—Salty Dog/Camp Nelson Blues—Gennett 6375—one known copy, E+.
Tommy Bradley—Adam And Eve/Pack Up Her Trunk Blues—Champion 16149—one known copy V+.
Tommy Bradley—Please Don't Act That Way/Four Day Blues—Champion 16339—one known copy, E+.
Tommy Bradley—Four Day Blues/(When You're Down And Out)—Superior 2736—one known copy, E+.
Tommy Bradley—Nobody's Business If I Do/Window Pane Blues—Champion 16696—no known copies.
Tommy Bradley And James Cole—Where You Been So Long/(Sam Tarpley)—Champion 16782—one known copy, E+.
Lucille Brown—Pay With Money/Good

And Hot—Superior 2552—one known copy, V+.
Lucille Brown—Can't Get Enough/(Bessie Jones)—Superior 2633—one known copy, V. with crack.
Elder Richard Bryant's Sanctified Singers—Come Over Here/Lord, Lord, He Sure Is Good To Me—Okeh 8559—estimated between ten and 15.
Elder Richard Bryant's Sanctified Singers—How Much I Owe For Love Divine/Watch Ye, Therefore, You Know Not The Day—estimated between ten and 15.
Burse And Shade—Fishing In The Dark/(Poor Jab)—Champion 16599—no known copies.
Burse And Stephen (?)—I Got Good Taters/Little Green Slippers—Champion 16481—no known copies.
Burse And Stephen—Tappin' That



One known copy...

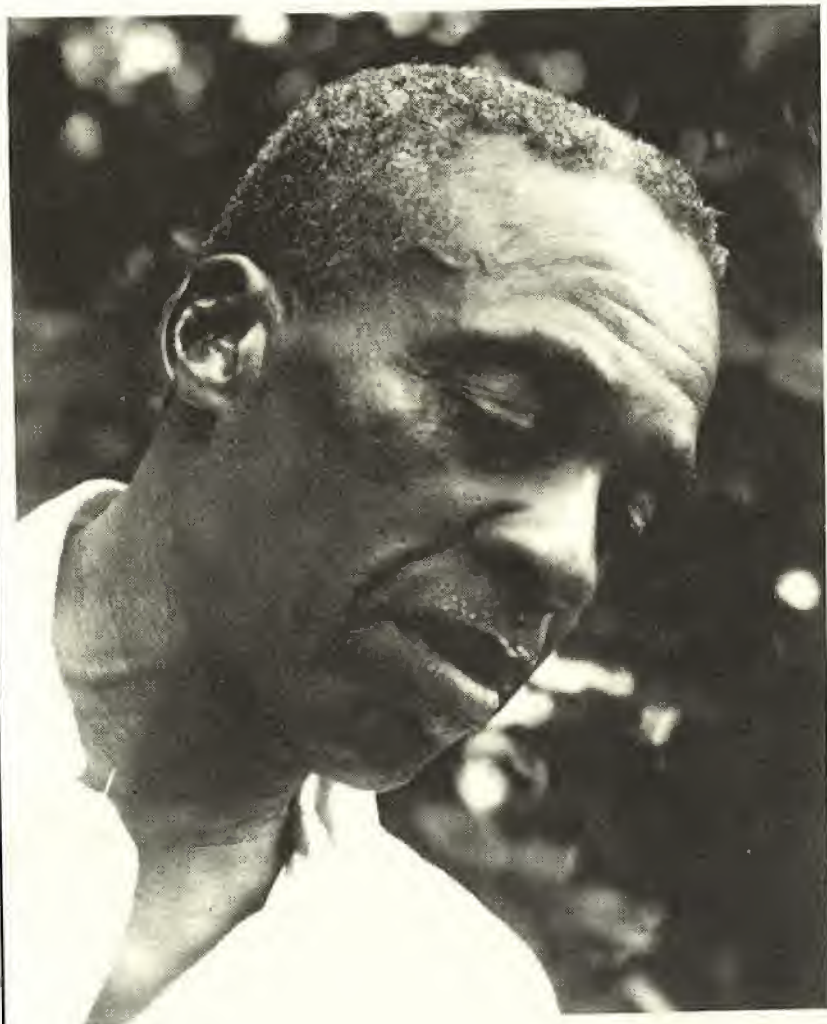


One known copy...

A. And J. Baxter—It Tickles Me/Dance The Georgia Poss—Victor 38603—no known copies.
A. And J. Baxter—Done Wrong Blues/Treat Your Friends Right—Victor 23394—no known copies.
A. And J. Baxter—Operator Blues/Goodbye Blues—Victor 23404—no known copies.
Birmingham Jug Band—German Blues/Gettin' Ready For Trial—Okeh 8856—estimated less than five.
Birmingham Jug Band—Canebrake Blues/Kickin' Mule Blues—Okeh 8866—estimated less than five.
Birmingham Jug Band—Bill Wilson/Birmingham Blues—Okeh 8895—estimated less than five.
Birmingham Jug Band—The Wild Cat Squal/Giving It Away—Okeh 8908—estimated less than five.

Coming in Number Four—*The Rarest 78s, Part 2*—Blues, Jazz, Piano, and String/Jug/Skiffle—C through D.

Thing/(Poor Jab)—Champion 16654—one known copy, E.
Clara Burston—Try That Man O' Mine/Pay With Money—Gennett 7319—one known copy.
Clara Burston—Try That Man O' Mine/Can't Get Enough—Champion 16125—estimated less than five.
Clara Burston—Pay With Money/(Alberta Jones)—Champion 16216—estimated less than five.
Clara Burston—Good And Hot/(Irene Scruggs)—Champion 16756—two known copies, both E+.



Skip James in the late 1960's...

A WHITE MAN'S INTEGRITY

(transcribed by
Stephen Calt)

A MUSICAL AND SOCIAL ICON—OLCIAST, NEHEMIAH (SKIP) JAMES OF BENTONIA, MISSISSIPPI MADE AN ENDURING MARK ON BLUES WITH HIS 1931 PARAMOUNTS.

FOLLOWING HIS REDISCOVERY IN 1964, HE PURSUED A CONCERT CAREER. BY TURNS ALOOF AND OUTSPOKEN, HE REMAINED AN ENIGMATIC FIGURE UNTIL THE TIME OF HIS DEATH IN 1969 AT AGE SIXTY SEVEN. THE FOLLOWING ARE JAMES' COMMENTS ON THE SUBJECT OF RACE, TAPED IN THE MID-1960'S BY STEPHEN CALT.

I know you're a white man: I concede you that and I recognize you as that. Now I have a time to speak, and a time to listen about such things, and when that time comes when I speak, I wanna speak in a way that you can understand it.

I tell you, if you don't speak for yourself, you are a coward and a darn fool, too. Now, I had a two weeks' program (concert engagement) in Philadelphia last year. I was sick at the time, and the company I was recordin' for gave this white cat the privilege to be my travelin' manager. He worked around Washington, and helped them handle books and sell records. This boy was named Dave—Godfrey, or somethin'.

And I noticed that after we got here the first week, he had to come home. He had a wife and child down there (i.e. Washington). I reckon the baby was about six, seven months old, but he couldn't stand to stay away from his wife too long 'cause he was on the jealousy side. He went home twice that week, and I had to quite naturally bear his expenses.

I say: "How come you got to come home so many times, man?" Just like that. I say: "You'll make a poor manager."

He say: "I'm just goin' home to see about things. I'll be back the day after tomorrow, or maybe the next day."

I said: "Okay, you can stay home." That's the last I seen of that guy till I met him with his brother. We was drivin' along together in a car.

He say: "Skippy?"

"I often thinks that with your temper that you have, why is it you ain't done got killed down in Mississippi?"

I say: "What?"

"I often thinks that with your temper that you have, why is it you ain't done got killed down in Mississippi?"

I say: "Why you think that? What is your object?"

He say: "Oh well...I didn't have no reason."

I say: "What is your reason? You tell me that *now*."

He say: "You ain't scared of nobody, is you?"

I say: "Hell, no! What I got to be scared of everybody for? The other man's human like me, isn't he? You have a specific object to ask me this—what is it?"

I was lookin' right at him. He say: "Oh, well...I didn't mean for you to get offended. I was just sayin' that—you ain't scared of *nobody*?"

I said: "Scared of nobody? *What?*"

He say: "I just notice how you talk..."

I said: "I talk *straight* and I don't do nothin' to nobody. Anybody I come in contact with, I will give him the straight dope. What I say I mean, and if I don't say nothin' I don't mean nothin'. I'll talk to you just like I talk to anybody else and I'll talk to anybody else just like I talk to you." (I was vice-versin' the thing to see what his object was.) "I'll tell you one thing: I speak facts, and I want you to tell *me* facts. And if you do somethin' I don't like, I'll tell you about it."

"Oh, I didn't mean any harm...I just said, 'you ain't scared of nobody.'"

"What the hell I got to be scared of anybody for? I'm meat, man! You can't do nothin' but kill me, if you think I deserve it. And if you beat me to it then, you're a lucky man. Now we can tie tails [i.e., fight] if you wanna."

See, you give a cat the whole rope, and just hold the end. He'll run to the extent of it, and he'll break his

own neck. But you take it, guys like John Hurt and Son House; they're just shaky. A white could tell 'em: "Go ahead and put your head in that hole, nigger." And they'll cower to that extent.

See, down in Mississippi, some of the old boys was just *scared* not to be like that. 'Cause you always had to back down. And if you didn't do it, some of them whites would get somethin' and beat the devil outta you. And those guys, they believed in gettin' two and three and four people mobilized, gettin' you in a store, layin' you across barrels, and gettin' axe handles and beatin' the shit out ya. All that kinda stuff. And I'll bet you they never did lay old *Skip* across there. Oh, no.

For concernin' my early life, I was always precautionous, after my parents would caution me to be aware of certain things in life. Quite naturally, they had experienced before I. I was taught to learn to give and learn to take: "Don't learn to give so much, but learn to take more, as you go through life. The Good Books says: 'Blessed are the meek.'"

There have been times that I have been so badly intruded on that in case I hadn't been taught this caution along the line of early life, I might have been penalized or been in penitentiary. Or perhaps of got killed. But I learned to take a lots and still give it.

From the earliest time of my life I was always afraid of bein' incarcerated, if I could avoid it. I would rather be a Zulu than to be incarcerated.

"A 'Zulu' is...helpless, dependent, obligated, and confined..."

A Zulu is used for convenience. You can put a lots on him that he will have to take. He's helpless, dependent, obligated, and confined; he can't help himself. He's under a compulsory to do what you say without his consent.

You can be a Zulu for a girl by makin' any kind of sacrifice for her when she's quite naturally usin' you as she wants to. If she's got that much influence over you then you're nothin' but a Zulu for her.

As I was comin' up, I seen lots of rivals in love life affairs and also lots of incidents where people were imposed on so badly until I would be in

sympathy with 'em. But I was powerless and couldn't do 'em any good.

You might say that these people were imposed on just 'dry long so'—without any cause. There are some people that won't protect for themselves, if they're soft-tempered. The more you put on 'em, the more they'll take; the more you see they will take, then the more you'll put on 'em.

People at that time, when I was a kid on those plantations, would kill you and wouldn't nothin' be said about it. Like the bossman say: 'Kill a nigger, hire another one. Kill a mule, I'll buy another one.'¹ Well, I was large enough to experience some of that stuff. That's why I'd always be very precautionous in travelin' around. Then again, I was thankful in a way that I had those experiences, 'cause it taught me to avoid such things.

Now I heard stories about slavery times and Civil War times from my great-grands. Them slaves didn't know nothin' in a way. I figure that they would have had to have killed me in case I'd been born at that time, 'cause I never was like that.

If it hadda been just a few Negroes like my daddy and myself and a uncle or two I got, this riot wouldn't been existin' now; everything woulda been settled fifty years ago. All along my early life, I'd tell boys: "Man, you let somebody stand up and beat you like that and you won't hit 'em back? Oh, shoot!" I feel like beatin' that guy myself then; I don't give a darn how white he was.

I was just like my great granddaddy in Bentonia; he came up under slavery. He talked kinda funny. He'd tell those cats: "Now, if you beat me today, you're gonna have to beat me tomorrow." 'Cause he'd do the same thing, again.

Now my stepdaddy: he's a mean bastard, too. Harrison Banks. He had a little place in Bentonia in '35 he had rented, and then bought it, too. An' old guy went to his place named Riley Williams, revenue man. See, my daddy's cows had broke out of his pasture, and this guy's gonna take 'em out and put 'em over there in his pasture.

I was sittin' right in the back yard. And my daddy told that guy—he talked funny, just like my great grand daddy—"Well, Mr. Riley, you



Skip James: "Southern white folks...didn't wanna see the colored fellow with nothin' but a shovel... or plough handle in his hands..."

understand? I'm a colored man, see? Say you want them cows? You pay me for 'em. Without that, you can't get 'em, and I will give you a good piece of advice, too. Get on your horse and get outta here. You understand that?"

And Riley Williams turned red and looked at him. He wanted to get a mob there, but my daddy say: "I don't care who you get, either; you better not come up to this house no more. See that hill over there? You better not top that hill. 'Cause I got somethin' for you (i.e., a gun). I got somethin' to keep the strong off the weak. Now, if you believe I'm lyin',

test me next time. In other words, get on your horse and get outta here."

Well, he took off then. He *better* have took off.

You know, the Southern white folks at that time didn't wanna see the colored fellow with nothin' but a shovel or hoe handle or plough handle in his hands, and a mule to pull it. Some places, they tell me, down in Louisiana there, they made the Negroes pull ploughs. And then wouldn't give 'em no place to lay down; just put 'em in a stall like they did mules and give 'em so many ears of corn. Sure! That was 'long about in 1910 or 1912; I was just a kid when

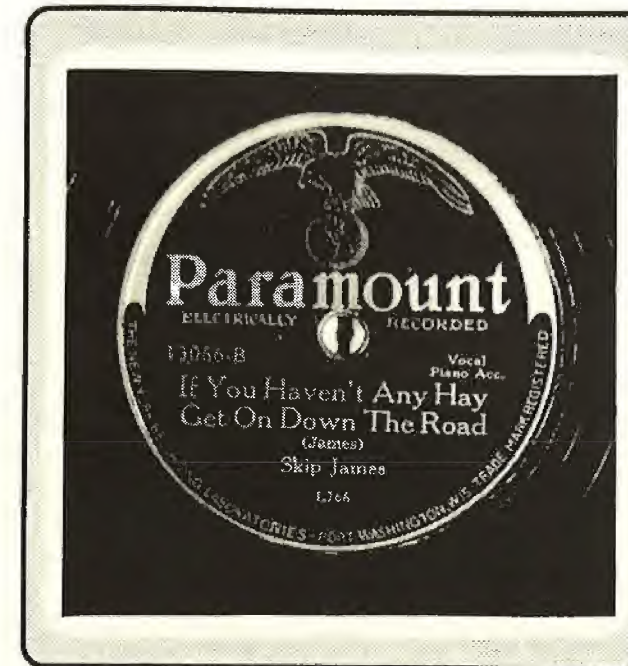
I heard about all that kinda stuff. I was big enough to understand what they were sayin', and a lot of folks said after I got up some size, it was really true.

Now I never did go down there and investigate. If I hadda did, they woulda had to kill *me*, understand. Just like I sang in *All Night Long*:

I'm goin' I'm goin', comin' here no more

If I go to Louisiana mama, they'll hang me sure.

In some places in Louisiana up in the 'Twenties, a Negro go down there and go in one of these stores and want a can of Prince Albert to-



"If I go to Louisiana Mama, they'll hang me sure..."
Skip James' 1931 performance was later titled 'All Night Long.'

bacco, you know? You better not say: "Can I have—" or "Gimme—"

"All right, what you want, nigger?" They wasn't gonna call you by your name: you were nothin' but a nigger. "What you want, nigger?"

"I want a can of Prince Albert."

"Of *what*?"

"A can of Prince Albert."

If you didn't say "*Mister* Prince Albert," shit: they'd mobilize you, beat you, right there. *Mister* Prince Albert! You *better* say that, if you want it. And sometimes those bastards didn't want to sell it to you, and didn't want to sell it to you, and *didn't* sell it to you: beat your butt and then kick you outta there.

I say, "Man, ain't that some stuff? What am I gonna go in there and get a can of Prince Albert tobacco and hear "You better say 'Mister Prince'"...Yeah. I'd a-been stinkin' dead a long time ago.

That's the time this riot oughta been organized. It should have originated right then.

If you speak for yourself, and know you're right, it's always best, like this one man I know. He was a boy I was raised up with in Bentonia; call him Robert Miller. And Robert

Miller was raised up with the Hancock boys; his mother was a cook just like mine was for them. Dick Hancock, Leon Hancock (he and I had some words when I made my last crop in Bentonia in '51, but that's another story), and Bobby Hancock. Now, Dick Hancock killed his own self in a car wreck. They was naughty boys; they believed in beatin' up the colored boy. You know how it was, down in that time.

So all of us come up together. To get to the main point: Bobby was a little old short-statured, fat guy, and one day, he got to be so that he called himself a master age: twelve or thirteen years old. So Robert Miller spoke to Bobby one day, he say "Hey Bobby so-and-so!"

He say: "What the hell you call me?"

Robert say: "...Bobby!"

He say: "Well how come you couldn't say 'Mister' Bobby?"

Well Robert Miller, you know, he was kinda like myself. He say: "What? I call *you* *Mister* Bobby?" He say: "Hell, I ain't gonna call you *Mister* *nothin'*!"

Bobby say: "I'll get my axe

handle and I'll beat the so-and-so outta you!"

Robert said: "Get it!"

Bobby had two or three more white guys 'round. He thought they would gang Robert and hit and beat him, while Robert wouldn't fight back. So he made a break at his axe handle, which was layin' inside a store there. I was standin' right there lookin' at it. And when he come back out there again, Robert met him at the door. And Robert grabbed him and turned him every way but loose. Beat him until he got blue—he turned 'way from *red*.

Robert beat him until a hymn come to him: in other words, till he was ready to cry: "Lord have mercy!" Robert whipped some of the rest of 'em, too. And if some others had of gotten the advantage of Robert, I'd of grabbed them and turned 'em every way but loose; Robert knowed it, too.

And *Mister* Hancock knowed it. Old man Hancock (he wasn't dead then) was standin' right there, same as I was. He didn't say a word: he just stood there and looked at it. Mr. Hancock didn't open his mouth, 'cause he knowed his boy was

wrong.

See, me and Robert was about sixteen or seventeen, and that little stinkbutt 'long in there about twelve or thirteen and talkin' about 'Mister' before he got eligible for it. Robert told him: "Much as we been raised up together, and we done ate together, and did everything else, and you ain't as old as I am, and I got to call you 'Mister'?"

And from then on whenever he say: "Hey there Bobby!", Bobby'd say: "Hello there, Robert." And Robert called him that until I left Bentonia.

'They didn't say 'Negro' there either—they said nigger, the dirty bastards...

See, Robert's mother had no doubt changed diapers on Bobby, and Robert had just about nursed him and raised him up himself. But then he wanna come up on him and demand that 'Mister' because Robert was a colored man, a Negro. They didn't say 'Negro' there, either: they said 'nigger,' the dirty bastards.

...I was playin' at one place up here in New York and one of my fans was sittin' backstage with his little old girl friend. I had just got off-stage, and he wanna show off for her, I imagine. He say: "Skippy, you got a new guitar?"

I sat: "Yes."

"Oh boy, that's great! Lemme see it!" I passed it over to him. "Oh man, this is a white man's guitar!"

Now I had already give him information in music; sit up two, three hours one night tryin' to give him music, and that's the kind of consideration and appreciation I get. I coulda said somethin' which I didn't, on account of the white lady there—I don't know whether she's a lady or not, but she's a white girl. I started to say somethin', but my wife hunched me...

I said: "Why do you think a white man should have that guitar?"

He say: "Oh, Skippy, I don't want you to blow your top, now. I know—"

I say: "No you don't." I said: "Now here's what: it could be a white man's guitar, but a black man got it, and I think I got a white man's integrity."

He looked at me funny, but I knowed what it was all about. He wanted to show off 'fore that old tackhead [brainless female]. I coulda did the same thing 'fore my wife or some colored girls there; some of my fans. I coulda showed my hindparts, too, *if I wanted to*.



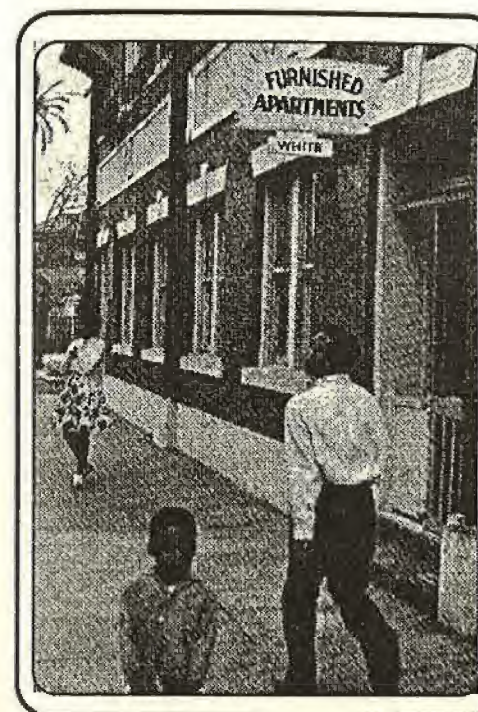
'That damned nigger, He's watchin' that white woman. Did you see that?'

Now here's how it was in Mississippi: you could be standin' up talkin' with one white guy there. You let a white woman come pass by you, and while you and him are talkin', he ain't gonna pay her hardly no attention. He'll watch you, to see if you're gonna watch her. And the first thing he gonna say is: "That damn nigger, he's watchin' that white woman, did you see that?" Right there it's a trap set for you, when maybe you just pass your eye

along and wasn't thinkin' about nothin'. He ain't gonna turn his eyes outta yours. You better not turn your head, or: "What the hell you watchin' her for?"

But you let a colored woman pass there, lookin' kinda presentable. Nice and clean. That bastard standin' up talkin' to me, face to face, an hour at a time, and that mollydodger stops, turns plum around watchin' that colored woman! He ain't payin' *you* no attention then: he's watchin' *your* color. That's his supremacies and authorities.

I'll tell you what I told one of those guys one day. Now this is the truth! Mack Rollinberg his name



'That's my cousin you're talkin' about...'

was; he had a big store in Bentonia. I don't know whether he was a Jew or Eytalian, but anyway, he's mixed. A foreigner. And he got stuck on my cousin. She was kinda light-skinned and attractive.

He told me: "Hey, Skip?"

I say: "What is it?" I say: "Yassir."

"I'll give you a dollar if you go in there and tell that girl I wanna see her." See, my cousin was standin' right across the street.

...Now, I could see these white girls across the street near where my cousin was. One or two of them.

I say: "You give me a dollar to go down and tell my cousin you say: 'Come here?'"

"Hell, yeah!"

"I'll tell you what you do: I'll give

you the dollar back if you go down there and tell that white I say: 'Come here.'" I looked him right in his eyes. Boy, he turned red! He turned red as hell.

"What did you say?"

I say: "What the hell did *you* say?"

He say: "Goddamn!"

I say: "Hell, I think as much of mine as you do of yours. That's my cousin you're talkin' about—you didn't know that, did you? Is that *your* cousin yonder? You say you want *mine*; I'll go and tell her. Then I'll give you this dollar right back and you tell that white lady..."

He didn't do *shit*! He went back into his store and closed the door. He knew goddamnit I had somethin' *for* his ass, too.

I was goin' to high school, and was about seventeen or eighteen. I was talkin' to some of them old pecker-woods on the streets down there [i.e., Yazoo City], where a bunch of 'em were standin' at a big drug store they called *McGraw's*. They said somethin' about a 'nigger so-and-so.'

I could hear 'em, so I said: "A nigger? What you-all *style* a nigger? What is a nigger?"

Of course, in speakin' like that you'd have to say "Mister" or either "bossman." I always *did* honor them like that 'cause I didn't want no trouble outta them. I say: "Bossman, what is a nigger is?" You always act a fool to catch one. I say: "What is a nigger, please-sir?"

"A damn nigger is just a damn nigger. I don't give a damn how much education he get, he still is a damn nigger."

I say: "Yeah? Nigger, nigger nigger..." I just stood there and said: "Nigger." I said: "Well, I'll tell you somethin': I have an idea about that since you said it first. Way I learned and studies about the different nationalities in my school..." I say: "A nigger: you is a *white* man; you *style* yourself as that, but now a *nigger*—*you* can be just as bad a nigger as any black man in the world. You know what a nigger is? Dirty heart and dirty disposition."

And boy, when I said that!

I kept on talkin', too. "I don't care what your color is and how red you are (I didn't say 'white'. I wanted to say 'how shit-colored you skin is,' but I didn't wanna do that and get *too* far outta line, 'cause I know what it would cause: a lynching.) If your heart is black and you have mean ideas and disposition, that's a nigger for you, right there."

They went to scratchin' their heads. Boy, they went to lookin' at one another. They wanna make a break at me *so bad*, but I had what it took. I was ready for it, too. I had one or two boys there with me from school, and they was ready for it, too.

'...I always kept me a crabapple switch knife... Man, you can cut a guy so fine...'

Then I always kept me a crabapple switch knife. They was in style then: long knives, with a blade about six or seven inches long. Spring blade knives—you just mash on the spring and it will fly open right quick. Man, you can cut a guy so fine till the meat'll get all in his eyes like dust!

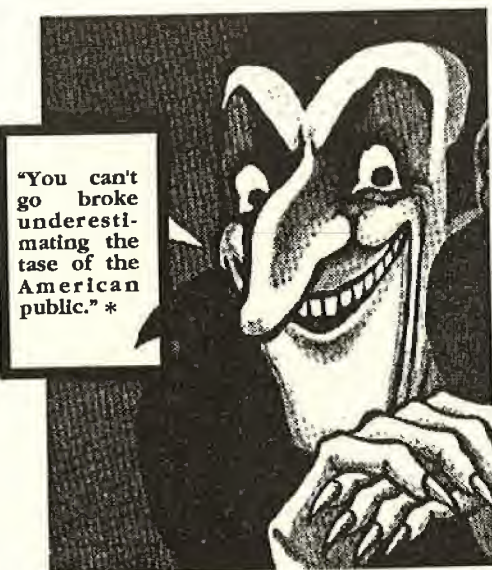
And they knew I would do it, and had somebody with me would do it, too.

I don't care how white, how red, green or whatnot you are: I believe in *right* at all times. I was taught that. And then another thing: I was livin' in a way, I would carry myself in such a way, so that I could *demand* "right" from other people.

I didn't care nothin' about nothin' then. I wouldn't take nothin' in them times. I was young, and I was a fool, too. A fool about my protection, and about defendin' for myself. I always had somethin' [i.e., a weapon] to defend for myself, 'cause I always believed in *right*.

But I was lucky; I didn't have no trouble but a mighty few times. When I got up in my twenties, when I got out in Arkansas on them bad jobs, where they killed folks every day, I never did get in nothin'. Just two or three times. □

1 James actually heard planters and levee camp foremen utter this saying in condoning black intra-racial violence.



AUCTION:

Closing Date: August 20

Listings of 78 rpm records are free, but limited to 30 items, some of which must—in the opinion of the Editorial Staff—be of "major interest or rarity."

21. Robert Johnson—*Cross Roads Bl* (becomes V last chorus)/*Ramblin' On My Mind*—Vo 03519 V+
22. Jim Foster—*Jailhouse Bl/Loving Lady Bl*—Ch 15320 V+

HOWARD W. BERG, Box 336, Hatfield, PA. 19440, U.S.A. NOTE; E+ to P grade range:

Trades preferred of slide or ragtime guitar, mandoline, jug bands, Ben Nawahi, including ephemera. American Music 104-Mobile Strugglers; Memphis Blues/Fattenin' Frogs E+ Brunswick 7097-Al Miller; Let Me Put My Shoes Under Your Bed/It Must Be Good V+

" 7138- Cannon & Woods; Last Chance Blues/Fourth & Beale V+ dig, scrs pass tol
Champion 16448- Jepsen & Donaldson; He Just Makes Us Willing/Jesus Has Lifted Me E+ tipple

" 16622-Walter Family; Flying Cloud Waltz/Walter Family Waltz V/V- slt strp Only copy
Columbia 13003D- King Oliver; New Orleans Stomp/Chattanooga Stomp E+/E

Gennett 6875- Smith & Davenport/Al Miller; Mistreated Mama/Mister Mary V-/V+ ugly crk tics
OKeh 40034- King Oliver; Working Man Blues/Riverside Blues V++ few scrs tics
" 8775- Lon. Johnson & Cl. Williams; Dirty Dozen/She Don't Know Who She Wants V+

" 8824- Blues Birdhead; Mean Low Blues/Harmonica Blues E+
" 8910- Elder Curry; Change Your Thoughts/Prove All Things E+
Paramount 3150- Red Brush Rowdies; Harbor Of Home Sweet Home/Midnight Serenade E noisy press

" 12531- Beale Street Sheiks; Half Cup Of Tea/Sweet To Mama V+ slt swish "A" 1

" 12683- Clarence Black; Cause I Feel Low Down/Bless You Sister E- press mrks nap

" 13119- Famous Blue Jay Singers; Clanka A Lanka/I'm Leaning On Lord E- swishy press
Q.R.S. 7014- Jubilee Gospel Team; Let Jesus Lead You/Station Will Be Changed V++

" 7065- Coot Grant & Socks Wilson; Uncle Joe/Can I Get Some Of That G+ Talent 806- Willie Lane; Howling Wold Blues/Black Cat Rag E press mrks nap
Victor 20593- Hymans Bayou Stompers; Ain't Love Grand/Alligator Blues E+
" 23302- Walter Davis; M.&O. Blues No.2/Mr Davis Blues No.2 VV+

" 23410- Tiny Parham; Pigs Feet & Slaw/Steel String Blues E/EE+
" 24607- Elder Michaux; Happy Am I/No Female Angels In Heaven EE+
" 38576- Jones & Collins Astoria 8; Astoria Strut/Duet Stomp V++
Vocalion 1279- Leroy Carr; You Don't Mean Me No Good/How Long How Long Pt. 3 E+

" 1401- Lee Green; Railroad Blues/Number 44 V/G+

" 03416- Robert Johnson; Kind Hearted Woman Blues/Terraplane Blues E+ black & gold

" 5226- James Cole String Band; Bill Cheatem/I Got A Gal V

" 5330- McLaughlins Old Time Melody Mkrs; Raisin' 'ell/Hilarious Zeb E-

Gramophone OA 37944- 1A shellac test Memphis Jug Band; Newport New Blues E+

General Phono (OKeh) 9145a shellac test Cliffords Louisville Jug Band; Struttin' The Blues E office copy
Autograph 5001- Milton Charles; Moonlight & Roses/Sometime E-Superior 2645- Earl Waters/Dan Leslie(Bullock); I Want You For Myself/Fall In Love With Me E press mrks nap
Vocalion 15511- Harry Richman; Blue Skies/Mine V+ sm digs tics

RUSSSHOR, 518 South 46th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19143, U.S.A., (215) 382-5979

Offers for sale or trade. Records are conservatively graded—so V+ means it's still a good playing copy. Please bid by label and artist. Trade wants: *Early Memphis Minnie (pre-1934)*.
Blind Willie McTell—Let Me Scoop/Rollin—BB 6007 E- (1" hic B side inaudible)

Wonder State Harmonists—Petit Jean Gallop/Castle—Vo 5346 E+
Blues Birdhead—Mean Low/Harmonica BIs—OK 8824 E+

Elder Curry—Prove All Things/Change—OK 8910 E+

Frank James—Snake Hip (great piano—never on Varsity)/Lonesome BIs—Champ 50018 E

Pork Chop Johnson—Pork Chop Stomp/Washboard Rub—Supt 9516 V
Lucille Bogan—War Time/Woman Won't Need—Pm 12560 V+

Elzadie Robinson—Too Late/Wicked Daddy—Pm 12689 E-

Monroe Walker—Hi Powered Mama/Black Heart—Co 14549 V+ (lc inaud.) (The next two are 12" Victor race records)

Rev. E. Campbell—I Shall Arrive/Let Us Eat—VI 35824 E+ (very rare)

Rev. Gates—Death Where Is Sting/Born Again—Victor (label no. omitted) E (int. hic. inaud.)

GLEN STAPLETON, 14 Kenwood Court, Elmwood Crescent, Kingsbury, London NW9 9AB, ENGLAND

Blind Blake—Police Dog/Diddle Wa Diddle—Pm 12888 V (plays strong)—\$500

Leroy Carr—Take A Walk Around The Corner/George Street—Vo 02986 E (v. slight label damage, side 1)—\$120

Walter Davis—Biddle Street/Frisco (pno soli)—BB 8961 E+—\$100

Sleepy John Estes—Liquor Store (Shellac Test 10")—E+—\$100

Skip James—Devil Got My Woman/Cypress Grove—Pm 13088 V (barely visible 1/2" hc—some vocal distortion but gtr sound very clear)—\$700
Blind Lemon Jefferson—Lectric Chair/See That My Grave—Pm 12608 V- (some scratches)—\$65

Robert Johnson—Come On In My Kitchen/They're Red Hot—Romeo 70757 V- (scrs/plays strong)—\$100

Blind Willie Johnson—If I Had/Mother's Children—Co 14343 E- (scrs)—\$80

Rube Lacey—Ham Hound Crave/Miss. Jail House—Pm 12629 N-—\$850

Cripple Clarence Lofton—Streamline Train/Had A Dream—Solo Art 12003 E+—and—Cripple Clarence Lofton—Pinetop's Boogie Woogie/I Don't Know—Solo Art 12009 E \$130 (the pair)

Kansas Joe/Memphis Minnie—When The Levee Breaks/That Will Be All-right—Co 14439 N- (immaculate)—\$450

Uncle Dave Macon—Rise When The Rooster Crows/Way Down The Old Plank Rd—Vo 15321 E- (plays very well)—\$85

Sam Montgomery—King of Knave No.2/Baby Please Don't Go—Me 61155 E \$90

Blind Joe Reynolds—Nehi/Outside Woman Blues—Pm 12927 V- to V (slight warp nap, 1/4" hc, very faint—nap)—\$2000

Charlie Spand—Back To The Woods/Good Gal—Pm 12817 G+ (plays strong)—scratches—\$180

(MINIMUM OVERSEAS ORDER—\$200)

PETE WHELAN

626 Canfield Lane, Key West, FL. 33040
TRADE ONLY: (Wants—Blues on Paramount 12900 thru 13100's; Blues & Jazz (some white string bands) on Black Patti, Electrobeam Gennett, Champion 16,000's, Superior, etc.)

Willie Barnes/Ala. Jazz Singers—My Gal Treats Me Mean/Honey—Ch 15378 V+ (start of hair moon crk, not in grvs.)

Kid Brown & His Blue Band/Al Miller's String Band—Mo-lita/Saturday Night Hymn—Black Patti 8049—V+ (rim flake 3 grvs. side 2; moon lam. crk. 1/8" side 2) (extremely rare)

Sammy Brown—Barrel House Blues/The Jockey Blues—Gennett 6337 V

Carmichael's Collegians—March Of The Hoodlums/Walkin The Dog—Ch 16453 V+

Tom Dickson—Labor Blues/Worry Blues—OK 8570 E+ (labels slightly faded)

Jim Foster—The Jail House Blues/Yellow Dog Blues—Silv 5137 E- to E

Frisky Foot Jackson & His Thumpers—Miss. Stomp/I Wanna Get It—Ch 15929 G+ (plays strong, dig 1st side)

Big Bill Johnson/Bill And Slim—Skoodle Do Do/Papa's Gettin' Hot—Ch 16015 V+

Slim Johnson—Mama, I Don't Need You Now/You'll Come Back To Me—Gnt 6698 V+

Elmer Kaiser & His Ballroom Orch—Monkey Business/Fox Trot Classique—Autograph V (1" hr. crk.) (side 1 fairly hot)

Kansas City Blues Strummers—String Band Blues/Broken Bed Blues—Vo 1048 E- (rare)

Lena Kimbrough/Sylvester & Lena Kimbrough—City Of The Dead/Cabbage Head Blues—Meritt 2201 V to V+ (some stripping side 2)

Wingy Manone's Orch—Tin Roof Blues/Tar Paper Stomp—Ch 16153 E (tight crk to label) (very rare on Ch 16000's)

Lizzie Miles—I Hate A Man Like You/Don't Tell—Vic 38571 V+ (Morton)
Buddy Moss—Undertaker BIs/Oh Lordy Mama no. 2—Per 6-04-56 E+
Red Perkins & His Dixie Ramblers/Ernie Golden & His Orch—My Baby Knows How/Dirty Hot—Ch 16661 E to E+ (black label, extremely rare)

Jimmy Raschel & His Orch/Paul Cornelius & His Orch—It Don't Mean A Thing/Sentimental Gentleman From Georgia—Ch 16534 E (cracked—repaired, pale orange label, extremely rare in any cond.)

The Scare Crow—Traveling Blues/Shake My Tree—Ch 16036 V+ (great Punch Miller-like trumpet on this rare orig.)

State Street Ramblers—Weary Way Blues/Cootie Stomp—Gnt 6232 V to V+ (internal hair crk, inaudible; strong pressing)

Traymore Orch—Soliloquy/(Tuxedo Orch)—Vo 15555 V+ (Ellington)
Clarence Williams & His Washboard Band—PDQ Blues/Cushion Foot Stomp—Vo 1088 E-

Rabbits Foot Williams—Ah'm Sick & Tired of Tellin You/Man Trouble Blues—Ch 15379 V+ (1" hair crk., inaudible)

Wolverine Orch—Prince Of Walls/When My Sugar Walks Down The Street—Gnt 5620 V+ to E-

The Original Wolverines—Limehouse Blues/Dear Old Southland—Vo 15708 E-

The Wolverines—I'll Get By/Sweethearts On Parade—Vo 15751 E

The Wolverines—If I Had You/I Faw Down An Go Boom—Vo 15766 E+

LETTERS (continued from page 3)



Important new facts about imminent dental surgery!

Le Dernier Cri Dear Sirs: I would like to recommend copies of your startling magazine to my dentist, Dr. Samuel A. Kratzner of Queens, New York. There, anxious patients have a liberal selection of magazines. His waiting room presents a range of exotica, quite a plethora of gems. However, I note that your magazine is missing. What a disappointment! What an opportunity! What a background for 78 Quarterly!—copies of your magazine placed on all five plexi-glass coffee tables (set tastefully near three Art Moderne sofas), surrounded on all sides by Modigliani repros on pastel walls—complementing the piped-in nostalgia of Harry James (interrupted only by the morning hush of air conditioners). I think your magazine could do double duty—first, as a relaxant before dental surgery and then, as an aid in transmuting the cries of patients— from pain and fear—to screams of laughter—REBECCA. KRATZNER, QUEENS, NY.



"From the sparkle in her eyes...
Paramounts are forever..."



It is with regret that we announce the sudden death of Nick Perls in August, 1987. Between 1963 and 1987 he had amassed what has been considered the world's *premier* collection of country blues 78s. It included a blues who's who of rare, legendary Paramourts, Vocalions, Brunswick, and Victor. Almost as highly regarded was his "other collection": early jazz that included the 1920's most elusive New Orleans/Chicago performances.

In addition to owning the "the most valuable 78 collection in the world," Nick was the producer of Yazoo Records, the largest country blues reissue label in the field, and a subsidiary live-performance label, Blue Goose. A few months before he died—a victim of AIDS at the age of 45—Nick sold Yazoo to the New Jersey-based Shanachie Records. (Shanachie's owner, Richard Nevins, plans to keep Yazoo's 74 titles in print, and accelerate issuances.)

We will miss the nostalgic blues and jazz sessions at Nick's Greenwich Village townhouse. The absence of The Perls' special humor and instinctive kindness leaves a vacuum. Nick once said: "Mental health means—you shouldn't measure *your* worth by the rarity of your records." Ironically, the collection is valued at "over half a million dollars." As of June, 1988, no plans have been made for its sale. □



Where are they today?...

Wanted—the addresses of these missing collectors/authors: John Bentley, Sam Charters, "Red" Coleman, Barney Crosby, Ed Crowder, James Edmiston, George Foss, Ed Kehoe, George Lauffer, Anthony Lee, Donald Marquis, E.J. "Eddie" Nichols, Ed Nickel, John Pipes, "The Record Pirates of Minneapolis," Jack Whistance.

\$50 Reward!

for features accepted by *78 Quarterly* about pre-World War II jazz, blues, country music, record collecting, collectors, and fiction. Please send manuscripts to 626 Canfield Lane, Key West, FL 33040.

Two pianists make the news!

Collector/author Henry Renard reports that George H. Tremor, the exciting soloist of *Spirit of '49 Rag/Some Of These Days* on Gennett 6242, won a Pullman Porter union contest in Alabama sometime in 1927. First prize was to make a record for Gennett. Mike Montgomery informs us that Tremor died in Birmingham early in 1987.

Henry Renard also notes that Glen Hardman the "breakneck" pianist on *Sophisticated Lady/Stormy Weather* on Champion 16649 (piano solos not listed in R.) was the house organist at The N.Y.C. Rockefeller Plaza Skating Rink through the 1940's. He is married to Alice O'Connell (Helen's sister) and is living somewhere in California.

